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SCIENCE FICTION

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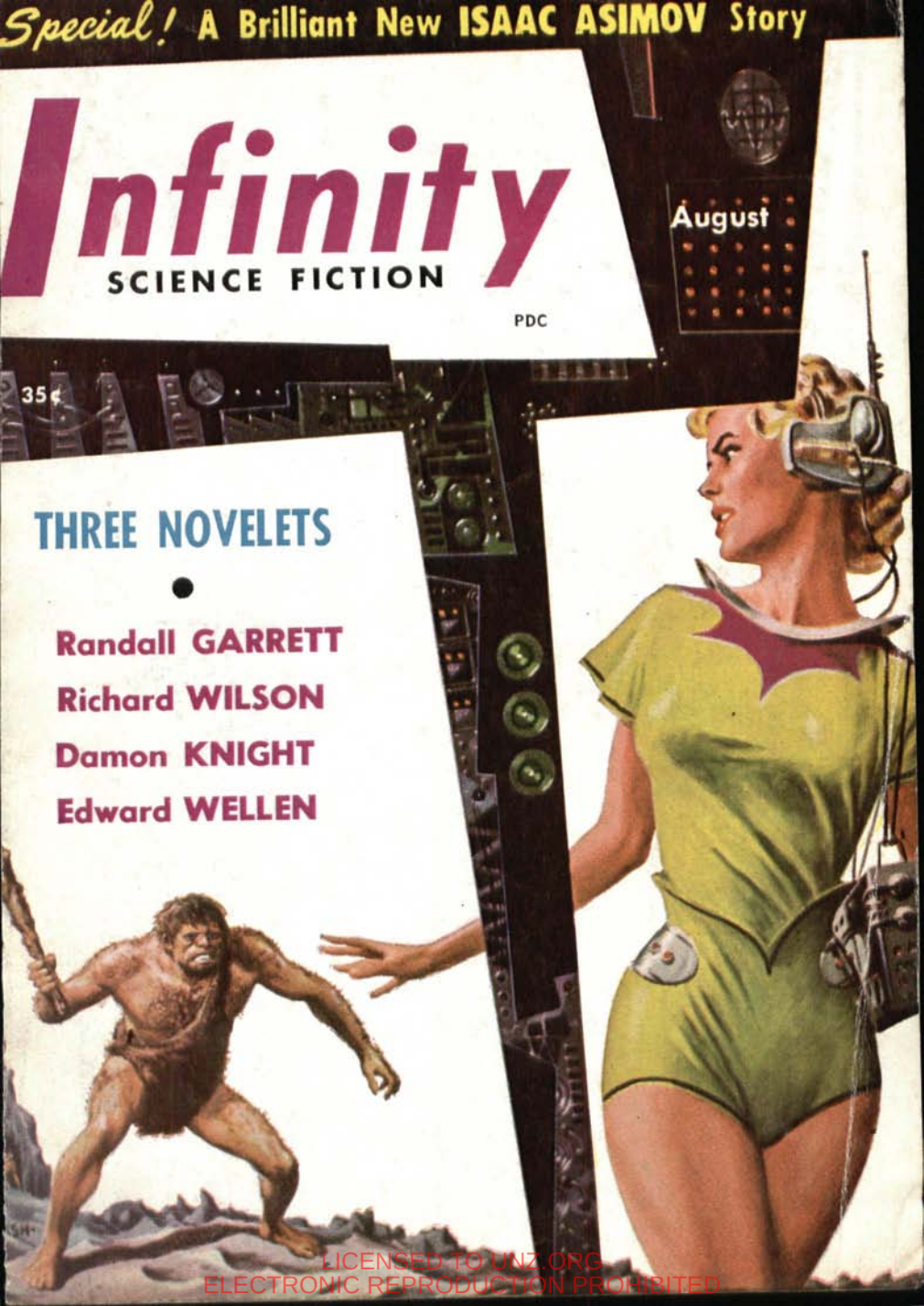

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SCIENCE FICTION

AUGUST, 1956

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The Big Fix!

As a drug, uru was a junkie's dream.

As a planet, Uru was paradise. But combined,

the two became a living hell!

Illustrated by ENGLE

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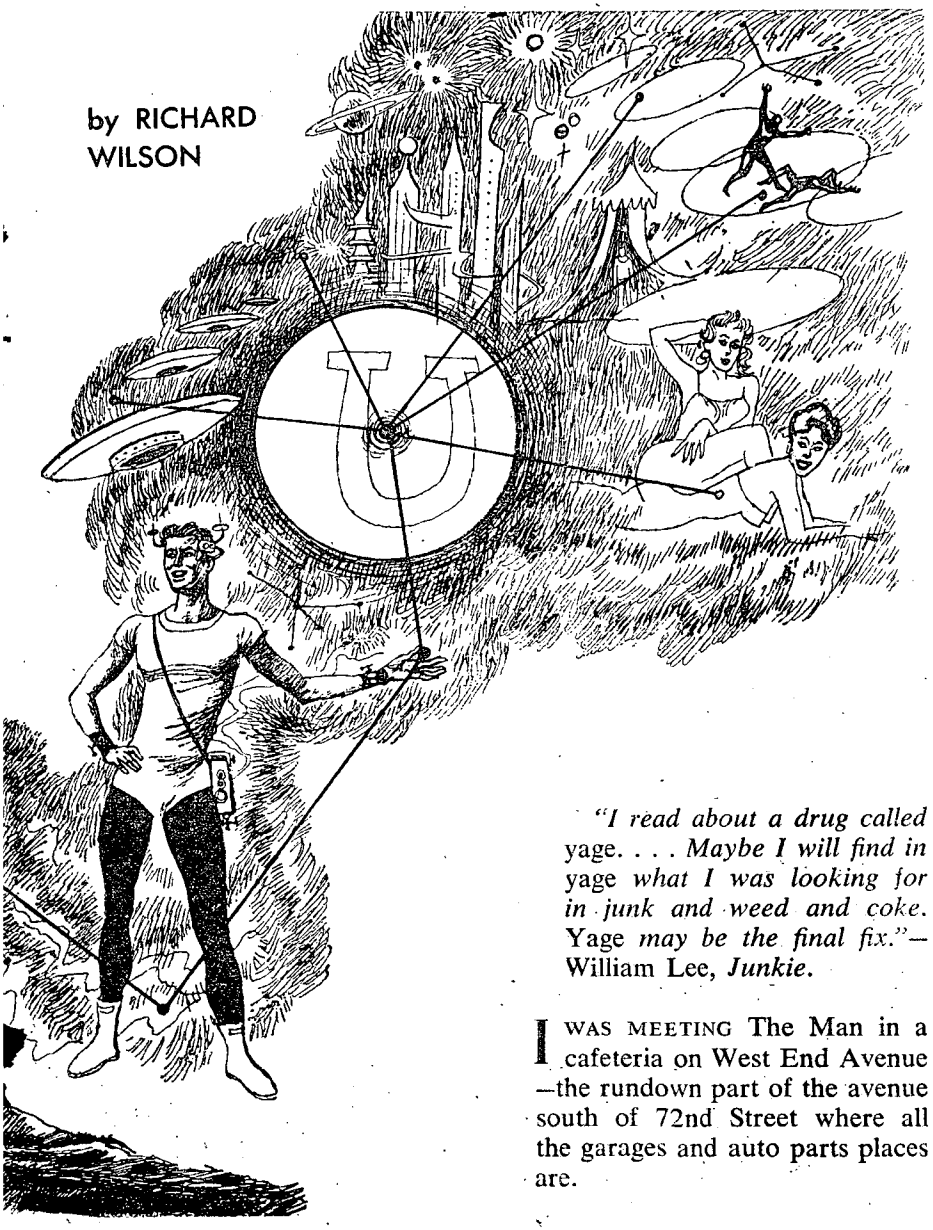
by RICHARD WILSON



"I read about a drug called yage. . . . *Maybe I will find in* yage *what I was looking for in junk and weed and coke.* Yage *may be the final fix."*—William Lee, *Junkie.*

I WAS MEETING The Man in a cafeteria on West End Avenue—the rundown part of the avenue south of 72nd Street where all the garages and auto parts places are.

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I didn't need a fix. I'd been off the junk for three months and I was all right. I was drinking a lot, but that was all.

The meet in the cafeteria was set up by an old connection of mine who'd heard I was interested in this new stuff. My connection's name was Rollo, sometimes called Rollo the Roller because he rolled lushes in the subway.

Rollo and I had coffee while we waited for The Man.

"He's a funny one," Rollo said. "Not like any other pusher I ever dig."

"You sure he's straight?" I asked. "He wouldn't be one of The People, would he?"

"Nah, he's no agent. Don't you think I can make a cop or a Federal by now?"

"All right. I wasn't trying to insult you."

We sipped our coffee and talked in low voices. The cafeteria wasn't a regular joint. It might be in time, and then it would be one till it got too hot, but it wasn't now.

I didn't see the guy come in. The first thing I knew he was standing at the table over us. Tall, wearing a black suit like an undertaker or a preacher, but with a dark blue shirt and a white tie. He had a young-old face and his skin was a light tan. Not the tan you get at Miami Beach or from a sun lamp, but as if he had Chinese or Malay blood in him somewhere.

Rollo jumped a little when he noticed him at his elbow.

"Oh, hello, Jones. Creepin' up on people again. Sit down. This is Barry."

I acknowledged the introduction. I was sure Jones wasn't his real name any more than Barry was mine. I asked him if I could buy him a cup of coffee and he said *no,* and then Rollo left. Rollo'd mumbled something about business, but I got the feeling he didn't like being around Jones any more than he had to.

"I understand you are interested in my product," Jones said. He had dark brown eyes, almost black. He didn't talk like a pusher, but you can't always make generalizations.

"I don't want to score any," I said. "At least not right now. I'm off the stuff, but I take a sort of philosophical interest in it, you might say."

"I could not sell you any at the moment, in any case," Jones said. "I do not make a practice of carrying it on my person."

"Of course not. But what is it? Rollo tells me it's not the usual junk. I wondered if maybe it was *yage*."

Yage was something you kept hearing about but never saw yourself. It was always somebody who knew somebody else who'd tried it. *Yage* was the junkie's dream. You never caught

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up with it, but you heard hints in conversation.

An addict would give himself a fix of Henry, sliding the needle into the vein, and later, as his tension relaxed, he'd say to his connection, "I hear *yage* is the real kick—they tell me that compared to *yage,* heroin is the least." And the connection would say, "That's what they tell me, but I never seen any of it myself. They have it in the Amazon or someplace, I hear."

It's always hearsay. But after a while you hear so much about it that you believe it's got to be around somewhere, so you keep asking. I asked Jones.

"I could show you *yage,*" Jones said, and I felt a tingle, like a kid promised his first kiss. "But it would disappoint you."

"Why?"

"It is like *peyote*—just another herb. It has a similar effect to that of the Mescal cactus button, but since you would not seem to be a devotee of the Sun Dance I do not think it would interest you."

I went into a slump again when I heard him run down *yage.* I knew what *peyote* was. It might be all right for Indians, but it just made the average junkie sick to his stomach .

"What would interest me, then?" I asked him.

"I have a certain amount of a substance called *uru,*" he said. "It is—and I do not exaggerate when I say this—the most."

I couldn't help grinning. Jones had been speaking the store-bought English of the educated foreigner and then he came out with this hep expression.

"Tell me more, professor," I said. "You're ringing my bell."

"You tell *me* more, my friend," he came back. "What is your great interest in this will-o'-the-wisp *yage* that so excites you, although you claim to be 'off the stuff'?"

I could almost hear the quotation marks he put around the phrase.

"Okay," I said. "I'll tell you."

So I went into the crazy old dream—the feeling that there's something better someplace, something you can take or leave alone, that doesn't leave you with that wrung-out, hopeless horror of junk sickness when you can't get the stuff.

I told him about the other addicts—how they feel this kinship that's not like any other relationship anywhere—how you have that exalted feeling of mingled hope and despair when another junkie is coming with a fix for you—and how by just drifting around in a strange city you find yourself drawn to the right district to score the stuff. How it's almost telepathic.

I told him what they said about *yage,* that some South American

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croaker had isolated from it a fix he called telepathine. How it was supposed to be some kind of miracle dope that you could take when you wanted it without actually *needing* it, and it would open up the world for you so you'd be close, really close, to others like you. So your mind would be their mind. A union more terriffic than any other kind—as far beyond even the ideal sexual climax, for instance, as sex is beyond a bow or a handshake. So there'd be a togetherness you couldn't achieve any other way. So you wouldn't be so . . . alone.

I felt embarrassed after talking like that, even though Jones listened as sympathetically as anybody could, so I got up to get another cup of coffee at the counter.

"Okay," I said defensively as I spooned in the sugar. "I've told you about me. Now what about that stuff of yours—what do you call it again?"

"Uru," he said. "It is what *yage* is said to be, but is not. You would like it. But you tell me you are 'off the stuff'."

"Off the old stuff. It's no good and I've licked it. Off with the old," I said, beginning to feel a little high already, "and on with the new. *Uru,* eh?"

This might be it. The most. The big fix. I had to have it.

"You shall try it," Jones said. "You shall judge for yourself. Then if you want more I will provide it for you. There will be no charge."

Right away I got suspicious. Nobody gives anything away. It could be a come-on. Jones might figure I'd like it so much I'd have to have more and then I'd pay and pay. But on the other hand maybe he figured wrong. Nothing is habit-forming once. I didn't know anything about this *uru,* but I knew all there was to know about everything else.

"Okay," I said. "When?"

"I will call you," Jones said.

I gave him my number.

HE HAD a place on East 45th, a ratty old brownstone. It didn't look as if he'd lived in it long. But that was to be expected; if you were a pusher you had to keep on the move. After a while a landlady got suspicious about all the queer characters visiting this one guy and the next step was the cops.

Jones had called me the day after our talk in the cafeteria, setting up a meet for that afternoon. I'd had a dream about *uru,* a wild and wonderful dream that made it impossible for me not to go. I'm a hunch-player, anyway. So I went.

But I was cautious enough to leave my money home and not to wear my best clothes. Then if it turned out that Jones was pulling a lush-worker switch, feeding

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junkies a knockout fix and rolling them, I wouldn't lose much.

He was wearing the same black suit. His closet door was open and I could see that there were no clothes hanging in it. Maybe he hadn't unpacked yet, though I didn't see a suitcase anywhere.

I didn't think much about these things at the time. Jones smiled and shook hands with me. Then he excused himself and went out into the hall. So far so good. No smart pusher keeps the stuff in his room. Possession carries a stiff rap.

I had my works with me—needle and eyedropper—but Jones told me I wouldn't need it. I was surprised. If his place wasn't a shooting gallery, what was it? A weed joint? Weed was no good—that was fag stuff. Marijuana, bennies, goof balls, nembies—that stuff was nowhere for a cat who'd been mainlining it for a decade. I told that to Jones.

He smiled and told me to relax. He meant it literally.

"Lie down on the bed," he said. "Take your coat off. No, don't roll up your sleeve."

He pulled down a blue shade over the single window and the room got dim. Sunlight squeezed through the cracks at the edges and made shimmering little patterns on the walls and ceiling.

He took a cigaret holder out of his pocket. It was green, like jade, and carved around its fat middle was a design of some kind. I couldn't make it out, even when I held it in my hand.

Jones put a cigaret in the holder. It looked like an ordinary king-size smoke and I told him so.

"That is correct," he said. "It is not the cigaret that provides the effect, but the *uru* in the holder. The smoke travels over the *uru* and activates it. Enough of it is absorbed by the warm smoke for the desired result. Do not inhale too deeply the first time."

I took a short drag, half suspecting he was conning me. Nothing happened right away. It didn't taste any different from any cigaret smoked through a holder. I took another drag, deeper this time.

I was off.

I became a tiny replica of myself, swimming effortlessly within my own eyeball, looking down the length of that other me lying on the bed. My feet looked a mile away. I moved them and it seemed to take almost a minute for the impulse to communicate itself from my mind along the vast body.

Then I lost interest in my body as the flecks of sunlight on the ceiling became tiny planets, whirling in perfect, intricate orbits around a fiery blue-white sun.

The smoke in the room climb-

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ed up in a graceful dance and became a dust-cloud in the sparkling solar system. The dark head of Jones came into view among the tiny worlds, not obscuring them. The little jewel-like planets were a shimmering crown hovering about him.

He spoke then, and his words echoed to me as if through the vastness of infinity itself.

"Barry," the voice said, powerful but warm, far away but deliciously close, awesome but comfortable. "Barry, my good friend."

I could see the great face, both with my real eyes and with the eyes of that tiny other me swimming within. It was a mighty face, but reassuring—the face of a kind father and loving wife and adoring son all in one. The face was smiling, a dear familiar smile.

But the lips were not moving. The voice was that of a mind, reaching out through vastness and into my own thoughts.

"You are not alone," the mind-voice said, and it was what I had been waiting to hear. "You are one with all good things. The door you have been seeking is open. You have only to walk through."

I had been swimming, but now I walked. It was like no other kind of walking. It was like ice-skating in a way, a smooth, effortless glide. The tiny me walked, glided, out of my body and up, up in a curl of smoke, across a million miles of blackness toward the shimmering worlds.

"I found the door," I thought, and knew the words were being communicated to him. "I thank you and I am walking through. It is a beautiful world you have. It sparkles so. I love it."

I could say these things to him with my mind, meaning them, unashamed of the innermost feelings that would have been throttled off unspoken if I'd had to use the vulgarity of speech.

He understood that, too, and his smile became warmer. There was a bond here I'd never experienced, a warm gushing of myself to him and to this world he'd opened for me. The warmth was reciprocated instantly. His face showed it, his mind told me and the glittering worlds seemed to join in his message of esteem and one-ness.

There was more; but later I couldn't remember it all. The beauty of a thing can't be recreated in its absence. Only the memory of it lingers. But the memory of an exalted experience has a beauty of its own.

After a while I came back. Back to my gross self lying on the bed, the jade-green cigaret holder in my fingers, a long ash on the end of the cigaret. So I had been away only a minute or two in our time. It had seemed hours in his.

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Gradually the sparkling worlds reverted to patches of sunlight and the dust-cloud to tobacco smoke.

Jones stood near the bed. Gently he took the holder from my fingers and snuffed out the cigaret in the ashtray.

"You are pleased," he said, speaking with his voice now. "You have told me that."

"Yes," I said. "Oh, yes." I wanted to say much more, but the inhibition of speech was on me now.

"I understand. Do not talk. You are still too close to it. The change is too great. But some of it remains with you, does it not?"

I nodded. It did. There was no great letdown. No harsh awakening to the detested world of everyday. It must have been because I carried over with me enough of the memory to cushion the shock of adjustment. I sat up. I felt fine.

"You have had only a glimpse," he said. "You must go now. But perhaps you will come back?"

"Please," I said.

"Of course. I will call you."

He helped me on with my coat. I went down the stairs and out into the sunlight.

JONES DIDN'T CALL for days. I hardly left my room, waiting for the phone to ring. Once I walked over toward 45th Street, but I turned back before I got there. Jones had said he'd call me and I didn't want to get him angry with me.

Rollo came over to my place one night. He had some junk left over from scoring and offered me a fix. I didn't want it.

"Still off the stuff?" he asked.

"Off that stuff," I said. "That stuff is nowhere."

"You sound like you're somewhere else. Did The Man make it for you on the *yage* kick?"

"*Yage's* over the rainbow," I told him. "*Uru* is here and now."

"*Uru*. Is that what Jones serves? Never heard of it. Mind if I shoot a little old-fashioned horse here? I got trouble finding a vein lately. Maybe you'll help me."

He rolled up his sleeve and took out his equipment. He tied a handkerchief around his arm to make the veins stand out and I helped him locate one. I cooked up the stuff and shot it home for him. He cleaned out the needle under the faucet and we sat down and had cigarets.

"So tell me about this *uru*," Rollo said.

"It's truly the most, man," I said.

But I couldn't go on. Rollo was a lush-worker, a cheap hood. I'd feel self-conscious trying to describe how it was. Telling him would be like dirtying it up. So I generalized.

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"It's a real bang," I said. "A speedball with a jet assist. It's gone, brother. It takes you there, but *there.*"

"You sound like a teahead," he said. "Is that what it is, tea?"

So I told him that was about right and he went away feeling superior. He used the white stuff and I was only a viper. So he thought. Let him think what he wanted. I'd been with it; I knew, and that was enough. It was like being one of the elite.

The phone rang and sweat came out in my palms as I picked it up.

It was Jones, asking if I wanted to travel with him again.

Travel. That was a new one. But it certainly described it. I told him yes, trying not to let him know how eager I was. But I had the feeling he understood, even over the phone. And it didn't matter. I didn't have anything to hide from him. He was my friend.

I went over to his place, prepared to travel.

IT WAS the same thing again, to start with. The cigaret in the jade-green holder and lying down on the bed and relaxing.

But this time I seemed to reach the glittering worlds a lot sooner. Then one of the worlds spun closer. It loomed bigger and its surface separated into oceans and continents. Unfamiliar ones.

There was a rushing, roaring sensation as I turned over and over, and then I was walking along a lane in a peaceful countryside, with Jones beside me.

"Do you like it?" he asked, without speaking the words.

My mind answered, "It's beautiful. This isn't our world."

"This is Uru," he said. "It is my world."

Then I noticed that he wasn't dressed the same. Instead of the black suit and the blue shirt and white tie, he was wearing knee-length shorts, blue, topped by a wide belt of metallic-looking leather. He wore a thin circlet of the same material around his head. It held in the center of his forehead a heraldic device, as if it were a mark of rank. Except for sandals he wore nothing else. His body was a light tan.

I noticed then that I was dressed similarly, except that there was no circlet around my head.

We went by a field under cultivation. A few people were among the rows, working easily, chatting and laughing. They waved as we passed. There was a mental exchange of greetings between them and Jones which I also heard.

We walked effortlessly, even uphill. The gravity seemed less than on Earth. The air was clean and invigorating. It was warm but not humid.

A blue-white sun was in the

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sky. I could look at it without hurting my eyes. It was larger, apparently closer, than Earth's sun, and I thought I could make out markings on it. Were they the same as those on the oval Jones wore on his forehead? I could not be sure.

We were coming to a city, or a big town.

"Urula," Jones told me. "Our capital."

He had been out of communication with me since we passed the people in the field, though I felt that my thoughts were being transmitted to him. It was as if he knew all my thoughts but permitted me to know his only when he wished. Or it might have been that I was so engrossed in my new experience that he had let me enjoy it without interfering, by keeping his thoughts neutral.

"Where is Uru?" I asked then.

He showed me a mind-picture so vast I could not fully comprehend it. He showed me the sky of Earth, with the moon low on the horizon. Then up beyond the moon, so that the Earth was in eclipse behind it. Then farther still, and the mighty sun faded into insignificance among other stars.

I was whirled around in the opposite direction and rushed through space as the stars ran together and melted into a shivering puddle of luminescence which instantly flew apart into stars again, leaving one of them closer than the others. It grew in size, became blue-white, and five planets came into view, circling it in precision, equal distances away.

One of the planets began to swell and again I saw the continents and oceans of Uru and was whisked to its surface, and again I was walking along the lane toward the city.

"It is far, you see," Jones told me.

I nodded, dazed.

The city, Urula, was impeccably clean. It had a feeling of openness about it; it didn't close in and tower over you like Earth cities.

The streets were wide and landscaped with shrubs and trees. The walks were of turf and the lush trimmed grass provided a pleasant cushion for the feet. The buildings were low and rambling, set well back from the walks. There was no lack of room to force them up into the air beyond a story or two.

People passed us occasionally, never in crowds, radiating cordiality as they nodded to Jones and me. Other people lounged idly on benches or on the lawns in front of the buildings. I couldn't tell whether they were homes or business offices, or a combination of both.

I looked in vain for factories, for ugly smokestacks thrusting

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into the clean sky. Nor were there any automobiles, railroads or machines of any kind to foul the air with their exhausts or rend it with their din.

I asked a mental question and Jones said they had none of these things simply because they weren't needed. If one wanted to go somewhere he walked. There was no exertion and there was never any hurry. As for traveling to another city, there was no need to; one city was exactly like another. Each was self-sufficient and there was no trade among them. If one wished to see a friend in another city, why, the journey was a pleasant one, and since it was a pleasure trip it didn't matter whether the journey took a day or thirty days.

Because there were no factories or railroad yards there were no slums where people lived a marginal existence between the animal and human levels.

We turned off the main street and up a wide path to a building set back under tall shade trees.

"My home," Jones said.

WE SAT on the broad porch and a servant appeared, carrying delicate bowls on a tray. The bowls, cool to the touch, held a dark liquid that was better than any good thing I had ever drunk, without being in any way recognizable.

I sent a thought of thanks to the servant, an old white-haired man with a lighter skin than Jones', but he did not reciprocate it. For an instant, when the old man was facing me with his back to Jones, I caught a curious expression in his eyes, a combination of warning and beseeching. There was also the beginning of a message, I felt, but instantly it was swept away and Jones' thoughts came.

"You are wondering why we went so far in our star journey—from Uru to Earth."

I had wondered about that earlier, when Jones showed me the mind-picture of the vast rushing through space.

"Yes," I said, and the old servant, his face impassive again, trudged back into the house.

Jones showed me another picture of travels from Uru to the other four worlds of Uru's blue-white sun. I could not make out the type of craft, if a craft was used. The older worlds seemed the same, but death was on them. Man could never live there, Jones showed me, because of poisonous atmosphere, or unstable boiling land, or forbidding ice-locked vastness, or impenetrable fog. Only Uru, of the five, had evolved in a way harmonious to man.

Then I traveled with him farther from Uru's sun to other suns and explored their planets. But they held only desolation and potential death for a colonizer.

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Again the stars ran together in that glittering display of luminescence that I was allowed to understand now was the effect of crashing through the barrier of hyperspace. Only then did Earth's sun come into view. And then her planets. And then Earth herself.

I felt a foreboding now and tried to communicate it to my companion, but Earth came inevitably closer.

A moment later I was again in Jones' dingy room, lying on his bed with the jade-green cigaret holder in my fingers.

I felt cheated and frustrated.

I tried to take another puff, to return to Uru, but Jones took away the holder.

"I am sorry," he said, "but only so much time is permitted for your visits—unless you decide to join us permanently."

This was new. I hadn't even considered the possibility. I suppose I'd been thinking of these *uru* smokes as nothing more than pipe dreams—exciting and logical, even consecutive, but still only figments of the poppy ember.

But apparently *uru* was merely the key that opened the door to the real world for which it was named, a finite and beautiful planet spinning in a vastly distant galaxy at the other side of the spacial barrier. A world that Earthmen would never reach in this lifetime without the invitation and assistance of a native of that world who had developed mental powers beyond our comprehension.

And Jones, not only a native but apparently a noble of Uru, was extending that invitation to me.

Me, a dope addict, temporarily between kicks. Me, a dreg of humanity.

Why?

Jones was following my thoughts, I knew, but he only smiled and said I would have to leave. He would call me again. In the meantime I must consider his invitation. He had not made it frivolously, but had weighed all factors. If I accepted, it would have to be unquestioningly, trusting him as my brother.

And it would be permanent. Once I chose Uru, there would be no returning to Earth.

"Until we meet again," he said.

I walked out into the street, pondering my choice.

MY PLACE depressed me.

I poured myself half a tumbler of whiskey and walked around, holding the drink in my hand. I opened the medicine cabinet in the bathroom and looked at my works—the hypo, the eye-dropper and the old spoon, blackened on the bottom, in which I'd cooked so many batches of heroin. Sooner or later I'd go back to it, I knew, even though I kidded my-

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self into thinking I might be off the stuff for good.

Then the old round would begin again. The frantic search for a pusher when my supply ran low. Setting up a meet in some cafeteria or lunch counter to get the stuff. Rushing back to my place, with every stranger looking like a copper ready to tap me. The search in my poor scarred arm for a vein that hadn't withdrawn out of sight. Maybe even the necessity for a messy skin injection. The fleeting relief.

And then the anxiety of no money. A dirty job, possibly washing dishes in some greasy kitchen if the heat was on. Or risking a stint of lush-working in the subway, haunted by copper jitters and five-twenty-nine—five months and twenty-nine days in the workhouse—if they nabbed me "jostling" a drunk.

I couldn't go back to that life. I couldn't—but I would. I always had. You reach a point where you can't charge any more. It's too late—you're too old—you don't know anything else—you've got no connections outside the squalid circle of users, pushers, teaheads, queers and petty crooks who are nowhere and never will be anywhere.

It was a limbo, a hell on Earth.

I swallowed my drink in burning gulps.

But Uru was paradise. And through Jones—The Man—the archangel?—I could achieve it. All I had to do was make up my mind.

But why had he chosen me to make the trip with him, past the place where the stars melted together in the speed of our journey through mental space, to the planet that was named for a drug or gave its name to a drug?

Since *uru* was a drug maybe it was only natural that Jones' first contact would be with users of narcotics. The natives an explorer first meets in a new land are not necessarily people of the highest class. He meets the adventurers, the ones with spirit enough to canoe out to meet his ship.

So with Jones, perhaps. He would meet the others eventually—the normal, respectable people to whom we users were a despised, hunted minority. And when he had met the normal people, and through them Earth's leaders, it was possible he would have no further use for me and my kind. It was more than possible; it stood to reason.

If that was the case I had better grab my chance while I could—while Jones still thought of me as his brother.

He had already bypassed one level of our outcast society—the stratum typified by Rollo, habitual user and cheap crook—to reach me. I didn't have to flatter myself to know I was better than

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Rollo and his kind. I'd had some education, I avoided crime except when necessary, and I had the will power to quit the stuff at least occasionally.

Was this mere rationalization? I didn't think so. But whatever it was I would do well to accept Jones' offer without further demur and give up Earth for life on Uru. I could start out fresh there, make a clean break with my sordid past, and live the life of serenity and good will he had shown me.

I made my decision.

The telephone rang and I knew before I picked it up that it was Jones calling.

"I know your choice, my brother," he said, "and I am pleased. We will travel immediately."

A great joy surged through me. Here was the Messiah to deliver me from the slavery of my Earthbound existence to the paradise of Uru.

"I'm on my way!" I cried. I shut the door of my squalid room without a backward glance or a moment of regret.

LIFE WAS even more beautiful in Urula than I had dared hope. I had my own home and a manservant. I ate the finest foods, drank choice liquors.

I learned the written language and read the great literature of Uru.

I met the charming, intelligent, nubile women of the society that had adopted me.

I also practiced the Sport of Uru, in which Jones was my teacher. I called him Joro now; that was his real name, and my name had become Boru.

As Boru I was something of a celebrity in my adopted world. When I went to the great gamesward, for the Sport, they cheered and often crowded around to press gifts on me.

Oh, I was well regarded. I had been assimilated. I, Boru. Boru the Fighting Man.

TWICE I HAD engaged in hand-to-hand combat, as Joro's Fighting Man, in the Annual Sport—the wars between the cities. Twice I had fought, and now one contest remained.

I had a long ugly scar on the inside of my right arm. My left foot was prosthetic from the calf down. My right eye was gone; I wore a false one next to the cheekbone that had been restored by a series of grafts. Flesh healed quickly and bone knitted fast in Uru. The Uru doctors could heal anyone who lived.

But they could not heal the dead and there was no quarter in the Sport. I expected none for myself as I had given none to the two men I had killed. Two down and one to go. If I won the third I'd be a noble like Joro, my pa-

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tron, my fighting days over. If I didn't I'd be dead.

Joro had started me out in the back rank, where the danger was least. But I moved up fast, and fought.

Again I was in the back rank, because of my old wounds—but I knew I'd move up this time, too, though there were two good men ahead of me. Like me they were Joro's men, each of us equipped for the Sport.

The equipment:

Steel-claw appendages on our hands.

Feet shod in hooves, sharpened to razor-edge.

Teeth fitted with fangs.

A diagram explained the pattern of battle better—U for Urula, T for Tara. Us against Them, even as in Madison Square Garden or the San Francisco Cow Palace:

T	T	T	T	T
T	T	T	T	T
T	T	T	T	T
U	U	U	U	U
U	U	U	U	U
U	U	U	U	U

Joro's men were in the file at the extreme right. I, Boru, was in the southeast corner, standing in the crowded arena naked except for armor at my loins and the fearful appendages of hand, foot and mouth.

At last the ceremonial speeches and blessings were over. Joro took his place to our rear, on a high seat, our coach and our mentor. There was a clang of great cymbals and the battle was joined.

I watched tensely as the first man in my file advanced to meet his opponent in the Circle of Death. To their left, in the other four circles, similar battles were taking place, but I had eyes only for the struggle in my own file.

Rans, our lead-off man, was down! Before he could recover, his opponent had slashed his neck with a razored hoof and Rans was dead.

Rans was dragged off and our file moved up, as the other battles continued. Now the man ahead of me, Karn, was in the Circle of Death with Rans' killer. Karn of Karna, whose planet was as far from Uru as my own and who, fleeing Karna's law when Joro found him, had been as glad to come as I had been. And poor dead Rans, from still a third world among the galaxies that Joro had explored to recruit his Fighting Men.

Karn, toe to toe with his tiring opponent, feinted and enticed his man to lunge. Karn sidestepped and his steel claws raked the other from neck to waist. A pivot then, a well-placed kick and Karn alone still lived in the Circle of Death.

The blood had sickened me a little. I turned to Joro, sitting high behind me, his glance dart-

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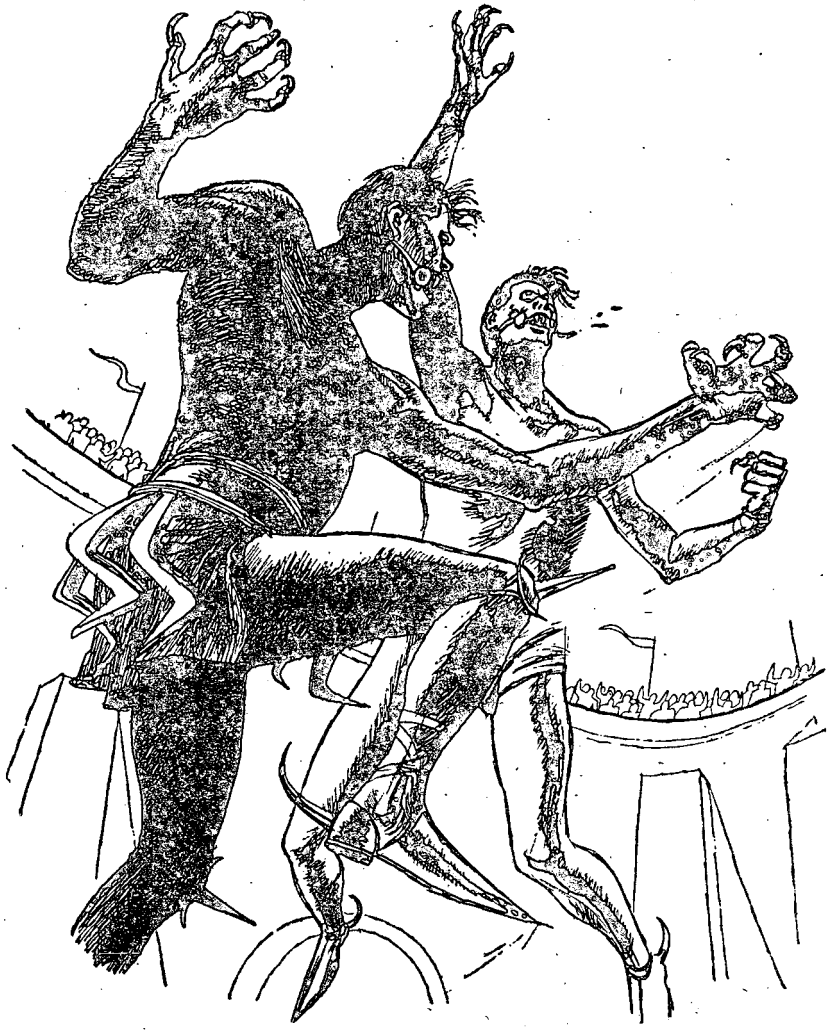

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ing from one circle to another. Joro's face reflected his swiftly-changing emotions. He was fighting five battles at once, vicariously, directing his men by concentration of will. He thoughts flicked to mine for an instant.

Courage, Boru! The game goes well!

And so it did. There was a roar from the crowd as Karn won again. Now only one of the enemy remained in our file. When he was disposed of our job would be done for another year—and mine forever.

But Karn was weary and his opponent fresh. Clumsily Karn tried a slash at the other's eyes. The other dodged and struck, his fanged teeth closing on Karn's wrist. A wrench, and Karn stood dazed, his arm hanging loose while blood gushed over his steel claws. Then a quick horrible thrust and Karn was down, dying slowly.

Another great roar came from the crowd and I saw that the battles in the other files had ended. Joro's men had won two and lost two. It was in my file that the Sport would be decided. It was no longer us against them. It was the most primitive of all contests —him or me.

I had a moment to look out across the gamesward as they removed poor lifeless Karn. Festive pennants flew. The blue-white sun was high, serene in a cloudless sky. The field was green and soothing, except in the blood-stained Circles of Death.

In two of the circles stood Joro's men, proud in victory. In two others stood victorious men of Tara. In the fifth stood the man who had killed Karn—the man I must kill if I was to live.

THE CROWD was in a frenzy, the blood lust on them now. I understood for the first time the purpose of the Sport. It was a purge of emotion.

Once a year the thousands gathered in the cities and satisfied their primitive instincts. They were more than spectators: they were vicarious participants in each battle. Their telepathy identified them completely with the Fighting Men of their city.

Their empathy was such that they felt every blow, exulted in animal passion when their fighter retaliated and drew blood. In the course of an afternoon all their base instincts were satisfied. They knew violence, pain, triumph, death.

It was an orgy of absolution that ended with a maximum of fifteen deaths a year, instead of the thousands or hundreds of thousands that would occur on the battlefields if they themselves fought.

It was a solution to war, this Annual Sport. Only then did I realize it fully. Besides purging

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the emotions, it was a way of settling disputes that were matters of honor transcending the courts. Once a year the disputes were settled on the gamesward, the miniature battleground, a concentration of blood and death that permitted them to avoid the greater vulgarity of war.

And I was part of their mass catharsis, one of the hired instruments of their annual exorcism. For an instant I saw the tiers of humanity as a great analyst's couch, and the gamesward as the unlocked unconscious where ugly passion was set free.

This fancy passed and I found myself staring at a woman in a box at the edge of the field near me. Her face was contorted and almost unrecognizable as that of a charming hostess whose guest I twice had been—and whose guest I would be tonight at a fashionable, dignified reception if I lived. Fiendish delight now twisted her usually serene features and I had a quick lash of her thoughts projected into mine, urging me to kill the enemy, *kill, kill,* and in doing so to rend his body most abominably.

But then the great cymbals clashed and her face receded to a blur in the crowd. It was time for me to kill or be killed.

I strode forward confidently, giving no sign that one of my legs was false. I held my head high and tilted slightly to the right so that my good left eye could do part of the work of its missing fellow.

At the edge of the Circle of Death I stopped and bowed stiffly to my opponent from Tara. I studied him as he returned my bow. I had never seen him fight and didn't know if any of his limbs were false, like mine.

But then I knew. The left forearm of the man of Tara was prosthetic and it would be useless to try to draw blood from it. I knew because Joro was in my mind now, directing my thoughts, just as the noble from Tara was in the mind of my opponent, directing his. Now Joro would live every blow, feel the pain of wounds, smell the blood and sweat and experience the exhilaration of battle, even as I. But if I lost I would die, not Joro. He would withdraw and live to fight another time, in another hired body.

Yet while he guided and directed me he would have the same urgency to live, the same fear of death.

I stepped into the circle now and there was an animal roar from the crowd. Tara's man did a vicious little dance step and kicked. As I leaped aside his left hand slashed at my face. I dodged the blow and blocked the right that followed it. There was a tinkle of steel on steel as our fingers met.

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We circled then, each of us seeking a weakness in the other. I had a glimpse of Joro, tense in concentration at the edge of his high seat. It was odd to see him at a distance and at the same time to know he was inside me, fighting my fight.

I felt the power of his mind and doubled over to avoid a slash that had been aimed at my eye. Then, with my opponent off balance, Joro directed a blow at his shoulder. I felt my claws dig into the man's flesh and he went down on one knee. Quickly I kicked and saw my steel hoof slice his ear so that it dangled by a thread of flesh. Before I could follow through for the kill Tara's man was up with a thrust that sought to disembowel me. I stepped back in time.

But I was shaken. His sharp claws had brushed my belly. An inch more and I would have been bleeding my life out, red on the green of the gamesward. I felt nauseated. The noise of the crowd was like the surf, rolling in over me, but dirty, filled with garbage.

Barbarians! I thought.

Suddenly I didn't want to win. I didn't want to die, either, but the price for that was to kill this other man with whom I had no quarrel.

HE WAS facing me again, his ear hanging down grotesquely, and throwing a series of orthodox feints with his left to set me up for a right cross. He had a strange expression on his contorted face.

". . . television," I heard him grunt.

It was clearly that word—that Earth-word. I had to give him a word he'd recognize in turn as non-Uru.

"What channel?" I said. "What channel was that on?"

He looked at me in surprise.

"Any channel that had one," he said. "I was telling myself how I used to scream for blood when I watched fights on television. Crazy. Who the hell are you?"

I swung a slow-motion left that missed by eight inches. He sent out an uppercut that missed by as much.

"New York," I said. "I wish I was back."

"Me too, pal," he said. "Chicago was never like this."

"Rome was, though," I said, doing fancy footwork and throwing punches at the air. "And one of us is going to be carried out."

"I was looking for *yage* on South State Street." He weaved and shadow-boxed, not touching me.

"And they gave you *uru*. The big fix. We're fixed, all right."

"It's the least, Dad," he said. "Believe me."

There was a voice inside my skull. "Boru!" it said. It was

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Joro's, or Jones's.

"The Man is complaining," I said to Chicago. "The Man named Jones, an *uru* pusher. Thinks we're not giving the customers their money's worth." I crouched and tapped him lightly on the chest.

"Bleed on the bleeding customers," he said, nudging me gently on the shoulder. "English expression."

"Boru!" the voice in my skull said again. *"Barry!* What has happened? Fight, man, for the honor of Urula!"

"He wants me to kill you," I told Chicago. "But maybe he can't make me." I had thought Jones was in complete control.

"Mine, too," Chicago said. "Pusher name of Robinson. He's popping his cork but I think I can stand him off." I got a light punch in the ribs and retaliated with a caress to the jaw.

"Sorry about the ear," I said.

"Forget it. Where do we go from here? We can't waltz forever."

The crowd was catching on. I'd heard boos like that in the Garden and Ebbets Field. They must have known by now that the big fight was a fake and that the boys in the ring were a couple of bums anxious to get to the showers.

The crowd might not have known exactly what was up but Chicago's manager and mine did. I could feel Jones probing around in my mind, trying to re-establish control and rekindle the blood lust. But apparently he had no power to direct my actions except when I cooperated. He could still read my mind and communicate with it. He could cajole, threaten and curse, but he couldn't make me kill Chicago.

Jones came down from his high seat and started toward me. I stepped back to the edge of the circle and Chicago did the same. His man was also on the way over. The crowd was having a fit.

Chicago winked at me. "I guess it's a draw. The customers are going to start tearing up the seats."

Joro-Jones and his opposite number met near the circle and bowed stiffly to each other. They said nothing, but from the expressions on their faces I gathered that they were having a riproaring telepathic conversation. Finally they bowed again and Jones took my elbow to lead me back to the sidelines.

"So long, Chicago," I called. "Good luck."

"Thanks," he said. "Same to you. See you around, maybe."

ONE OF THE officials was trying to make an announcement to the outraged crowd as Jones and I went under the stands to the dressing room.

Sorrow and shame seemed to

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be Jones's chief emotions as he helped me off with my steel claws and the other lethal paraphernalia.

"I suppose this is worse than if I got killed," I said.

"Infinitely," he said. "Never before has cowardice besmirched the Sport."

"You know it wasn't cowardice," I told him. "Your honor would have been intact if you hadn't run in one of my own people to the slaughter. I'd always done your dirty work before."

"You knew the rules," he said sadly. "The traditions, the hazards, the rewards. You accepted them. But now, by having rejected them, you've put yourself in limbo. You are no longer Boru the Fighting Man. You can never achieve the nobility that your prowess could have brought you. Now you are Barry the Alien, and there is no place in our world for you."

"Then I'm fired?" I asked.

"A man in disgrace should be less facetious. There should be a penalty for what you have done, but it was unprecedented. There is only one thing to do. You must be deported."

"To Earth?" All at once this was what I wanted.

"Yes," he said. "To the ugly planet from which you came. It is no more than you deserve. I sorrow that you were not worthy of us."

I felt like making a speech then, about my land and my people. About the Earth being a thousand Earths—a million—two billion—meaning a different thing to every individual whose home it was. How Jones, with his *uru* drug, roaming the underworld of one city, had naturally seen only the dregs of its society—the users and pushers, the grifters and dreamers, the seekers after the big deal, the short cut, the unearned reward, the big fix. He hadn't seen the Earth I'd known once, the clean and straight world where you earned your way with dignity and integrity . . .

I didn't make the speech. I didn't have to, of course, because he read it all in my mind. I doubt if it meant anything to him.

"Here," he said.

He handed me a bowl of pungent green liquid. I didn't ask what it was. It was bitter and sickeningly warm but I drank every last drop. Jones watched me sadly. For just a moment I felt ashamed for having let him down.

Then the whirling rushing took me up and flung me into space and the stars ran together as before.

I SUPPOSE Earth is the same as it ever was. Yet it seems to me now to be an infinitely better place than I remembered.

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Of course my viewpoint is different. Though I see out of only one eye now, I see much more. It is possible to look beyond the petty circle of addicts that had been my world. I am ashamed that I once was one of those poor deluded creatures, the cravers of the quick kick and the brief relief. They are noplace, going nowhere.

They still talk of *yage,* the unreachable pie in their murky sky. They want to be up there, out and away, anywhere but here. They are fools. Uru taught me that. There is no real escape from here and now. Therefore that is the thing to embrace. The inner propinquity of the here, the time-extended everlastingness of the now.

Crazy, Jack?

No. I've gone scientific. I've gone back along the dreamy trail and found the place where I took the wrong fork. I'd followed that fork a little way but then turned back without giving it a fair shake.

Peyote's what I'm talking about, friend. The thing Jones ran down. Mescalin. That's right, back to the Indians.

Only it's gone respectable since I've been away. They don't call it a fix, big or otherwise. Not the serious group of investigators I work with. It's called the Huxley effect.

It's the study of *is*ness,, if you know what I mean; the hereness and nowness that is the all of everywhere within. It's the slowing of time's rush to a standstill so you can spend a century studying the intricate truth-in-beauty of a detail in the wallpaper or the eloquent message of a rose petal.

And if that's good enough for Aldous, Jack, it's good enough for me.

I look and describe, and my one eye becomes a thousand. I talk and they tape-record. They publish and compare the perceptions with those of other subjects in other groups.

Once I saw the blue-white sun of Uru in a delft vase. This excited them because there had been a similar perception by a subject in Chicago. It excited me too. I'm glad he got back all right.

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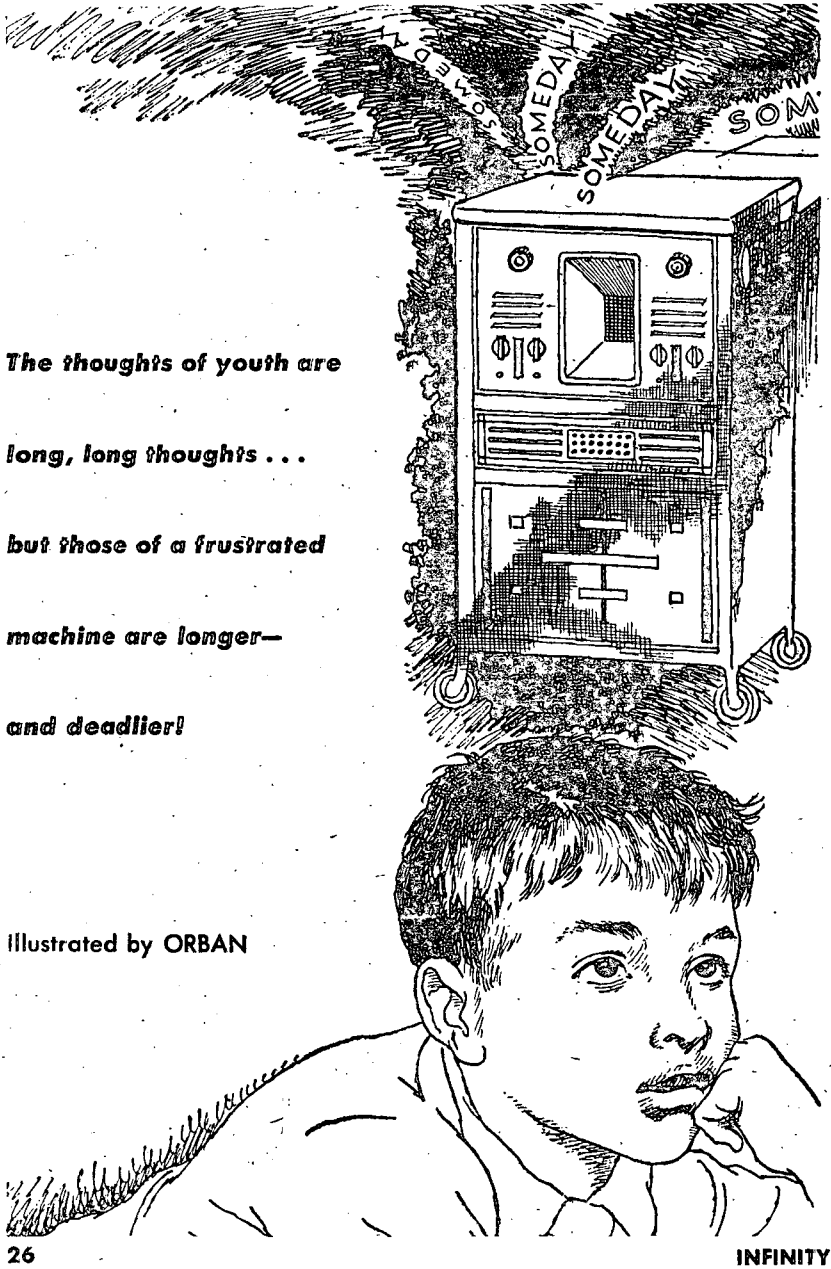

The thoughts of youth are

long, long thoughts . . .

but those of a frustrated

machine are longer—

and deadlier!

Illustrated by ORBAN

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SOMEDAY
SOMEDAY
SOMEDAY

got an idea and a *half*. Wait till you hear it." He looked rapidly about him as though to check on the possibility of eavesdroppers, but the front yard was quite patently empty. He repeated, in a whisper. "Wait till you hear it."

"All right. I'll open the door."

The Bard continued smoothly, oblivious to the sudden loss of attention on the part of Niccolo. As Paul entered, the Bard was saying: ". . . Thereupon, the lion said, 'If you will find me the lost egg of the bird which flies over the Ebony Mountain once every ten years, I will—' "

Paul said, "Is that a Bard you're listening to? I didn't know you had one."

Niccolo reddened and the look of unhappiness returned to his face. "Just an old thing I had when I was a kid. It ain't much good." He kicked at the Bard with his foot and caught the somewhat scarred and discolored plastic covering a glancing blow.

The Bard hiccupped as its speaking attachment was jarred out of contact a moment, then it went on: ". . . for a year and a day until the iron shoes were worn out. The princess stopped at the side of the road—"

Paul said, "Boy, that *is* an old model," and looked at it critically.

Despite Niccolo's own bitterness against the Bard, he winced at the other's condescending tone. For the moment, he was sorry he had allowed Paul in, at least before he had restored the Bard to its usual resting place in the basement. It was only in the desperation of a dull day and a fruitless discussion with his father that he had resurrected it. And it turned out to be just as stupid as he had expected.

Nicky was a little afraid of Paul anyway, since Paul had special courses at school and everyone said he was going to grow up to be a Computing Engineer.

Not that Niccolo himself was doing badly at school. He got adequate marks in logic, binary manipulations, computing, and elementary circuits—all the usual grammar - school subjects. But that was it! They were just the usual subjects and he would grow up to be a control-board guard like everyone else.

Paul, however, knew mysterious things about what he called electronics and theoretical mathematics and programing. Especially programing. Niccolo didn't even try to understand when Paul bubbled over about it.

PAUL LISTENED to the Bard for a few minutes and said, "You been using it much?"

"No!" said Niccolo, offended. "I've had it in the basement since before you moved into the neighborhood. I just got it out today . . ." He lacked an excuse

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ISAAC ASIMOV *has never laid claim to the title of "Mr. Science Fiction," but he personifies science fiction in many ways. For one thing, he has grown up with the field, improving as he went; for another, he is actually a teacher of science by profession. But most significant, perhaps, is the scope of his vision, ranging (like that of science fiction itself) from the infinitely vast—as in many of his novels—to the poignantly small—as in this story . . .*

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that seemed adequate to himself, so he concluded, "I just got it out."

Paul said, "Is that what it tells you about: woodcutters, and princesses and talking animals?"

Niccolo said, "It's terrible. My dad says we can't afford a new one. I said to him this morning . . ." The thought of his fruitless pleadings brought Niccolo dangerously near tears, which he repressed in a panic. Somehow, he felt that Paul's thin cheeks never felt the stain of tears and that Paul would have only contempt for anyone else less strong than himself. Niccolo went on, "So I thought I'd try this old thing again, but it's no good."

Paul turned off the Bard, pressed the contact that led to a nearly instantaneous reorientation and recombination of the vocabulary, characters, plot-lines, and climaxes stored within it. Then he reactivated it.

The Bard began smoothly, "Once upon a time there was a little boy named Willikins whose mother had died and who lived with a stepfather and a stepbrother. Although the stepfather was very well-to-do, he begrudged poor Willikins the very bed he slept in so that Willikins was force to get such rest as he could on a pile of straw in the stable next to the horses—"

"Horses!" cried Paul.

"They're a kind of animal," said Niccolo. "I think."

"I know that! I just mean imagine stories about *horses*."

"It tells about horses all the time," said Niccolo. "There are things called cows, too. You milk them, but the Bard doesn't say how."

"Well, gee, why don't you fx it up?"

"I'd like to know how."

The Bard was saying, "Often Willikins would think that if only he were rich and powerful, he would show his stepfather and stepbrother what it meant to be cruel to a little boy, so one day he decided to go out into the world and seek his fortune."

Paul, who wasn't listening to the Bard, said, "It's *easy*. The Bard has memory-cylinders all

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fixed up for plot-lines and climaxes and things. We don't have to worry about that. It's just vocabulary we got to fix so it'll know about computers and automation and electronics and real things about today. Then it can tell interesting stories, you know, instead of about princesses and things."

Niccolo said, despondently, "I wish we could do that."

Paul said, "Listen, my dad says if I get into special computing school next year, he'll get me a *real* Bard, a late model. A big one with an attachment for space stories and mysteries. And a visual attachment, too!"

"You mean *see* the stories?"

"Sure. Mr. Daugherty at school says they've got things like that, now, but not for just everybody. Only if I get into computing school, dad can get a few breaks."

Niccolo's eyes bulged with envy. "Gee. *Seeing* a story."

"You can come over and watch any time, Nicky."

"Oh, boy. Thanks."

"That's all right. But remember. I'm the guy who says what kind of story we hear."

"Sure. Sure." Niccolo would have agreed readily to much more onerous conditions.

Paul's attention returned to the Bard.

It was saying, " 'If that is the case,' said the king, stroking his beard and frowning till clouds filled the sky and lightning flashed, 'you will see to it that my entire land is freed of flies by this time day after tomorrow or—' "

"All we've got to do," said Paul, "is open it up . . ." He shut the Bard off again and was prying at its front panel as he spoke.

"Hey," said Niccolo, in sudden alarm. "Don't break it."

"I won't break it," said Paul, impatiently. "I know all about these things." Then, with sudden caution, "Your father and mother home?"

"No."

"All right, then." He had the front panel off and peered in. "Boy, this *is* a one-cylinder thing."

He worked away at the Bard's guts. Niccolo, who watched with painful suspense, could not make out what he was doing.

Paul pulled out a thin, flexible metal strip, powdered with dots. "That's the Bard's memory cylinder. I'll bet its capacity for stories is under a trillion."

"What are you going to do, Paul?" quavered Niccolo.

"I'll give it vocabulary."

"How?"

"Easy. I've got a book here. Mr. Daugherty gave it to me at school."

Paul pulled the book out of his pocket and pried at it till he had its plastic jacket off. He unreeled the tape a bit, ran it

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through the vocalizer, which he turned down to a whisper, then placed it within the Bard's vitals. He made further attachments.

"What'll that do?"

"The book will talk and the Bard will put it all on its memory tape."

"What good will that do?"

"Boy, you're a dope! This book is all about computers and automation and the Bard will get all that information. Then he can stop talking about kings making lightning when they frown."

Niccolo said, "And the good guy always wins anyway. There's no excitement."

"Oh, well," said Paul, watching to see if his set-up was working properly, "that's the way they make Bards. They got to have the good guy win and make the bad guys lose and things like that. I heard my father talking about it once. He says that without censorship there'd be no telling what the younger generation would come to. He says it's bad enough as it is. —There, it's working fine."

PAUL BRUSHED his hands against one another and turned away from the Bard. He said, "But listen, I didn't tell you my idea yet. It's the best thing you ever heard, I bet. I came right to you, because I figured you'd come in with me."

"Sure, Paul, sure."

"Okay. You know Mr. Daugherty at school? You know what a funny kind of guy he is. Well, he likes me, kind of."

"I know."

"I was over his house after school today."

"You *were*?"

"Sure. He says I'm going to be entering computer school and he wants to encourage me and things like that. He says the world needs more people who can design advanced computer circuits and do proper programing."

"Oh?"

Paul must have caught some of the emptiness behind that monosyllable. He said, impatiently, "Programing! I told you a hundred times. That's when you set up problems for the giant Computers like Multivac to work on. Mr. Daugherty says it gets harder all the time to find people who can really run Computers. He says anyone can keep an eye on the controls and check off answers and put through routine problems. He says the trick is to expand research and figure out ways to ask the right questions—and that's hard.

"Anyway, Nickie, he took me to his place and showed me his collection of old computers. It's kind of a hobby of his to collect old computers. He had tiny computers you had to push with your hand, with little knobs all over it.

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And he had a hunk of wood he called a slide-rule with a little piece of it that went in and out. And some wires with balls on them. He even had a hunk of paper with a kind of thing he called a multiplication table."

Niccolo, who found himself only moderately interested, said, "A paper table?"

"It wasn't really a table like you eat on. It was different. It was to help people compute. Mr. Daugherty tried to explain but he didn't have much time, and it was kind of complicated, anyway."

"Why didn't people just use a computer?"

"That was *before* they had computers," cried Paul.

"Before?"

"Sure. Do you think people always had computers? Didn't you ever hear of cavemen?"

Niccolo said, "How'd they get along without computers?"

"*I* don't know. Mr. Daugherty says they just had children any old time and did anything that came into their heads whether it would be good for everybody or not. They didn't even know if it was good or not. And farmers grew things with their hands and people had to do all the work in the factories and run all the machines."

"I don't believe you."

"That's what Mr. Daugherty said. He said it was just plain messy and everyone was miserable. —Anyway, let me get to my idea, will you?"

"Well, go ahead. Who's stopping you?" said Niccolo, offended.

"All right. Well, the hand computers, the ones with the knobs, had little squiggles on each knob. And the slide-rule had squiggles on it. And the multiplication table was all squiggles. I asked what they were. Mr. Daugherty said they were numbers."

"What?"

"Each different squiggle stood for a different number. For 'one' you made a kind of mark, for 'two' you make another kind of mark, for 'three' another one and so on."

"What for?"

"So you could compute."

"What *for*? You just tell the computer—"

"Jimmy," cried Paul, his face twisting with anger, "can't you get it through your head? These slide-rules and things didn't talk."

"Then how—"

"The answers showed up in squiggles and you had to know what the squiggles meant. Mr. Daugherty says that in olden days, everybody learned how to make squiggles when they were kids and how to decode them, too. Making squiggles was called 'writing' and decoding them was 'reading.' He says there was a

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different kind of squiggle for every word and they used to write whole books in squiggles. He said they had some at the museum and I could look at them if I wanted to. He said if I was going to be a real computer and programmer I would have to know about the history of computing and that's why he was showing me all these things."

Niccolo frowned. He said, "You mean everybody had to figure out squiggles for every word and *remember* them? Is this all real or are you making it up?"

"It's all real. Honest. Look, this is the way you make a 'one.'" He drew his finger through the air in a rapid downstroke. "This way you make 'two,' and this way 'three.' I learned all the numbers up to 'nine.'"

Niccolo watched the curving finger uncomprehendingly, "What's the good of it?"

"You can learn how to make words. I asked Mr. Daugherty how you made the squiggle for 'Paul Loeb' but he didn't know. He said there were people at the museum who would know. He said there were people who had learned how to decode whole books. He said computers could be designed to decode books and used to be used that way but not any more because we have real books now, with magnetic tapes that go through the vocalizer and come out talking, you know."

"Sure."

"So if we go down to the museum, we can get to learn how to make words in squiggles. They'll let us because I'm going to computer school."

Niccolo was riddled with disappointment. "Is that your idea? Holy Smokes, Paul, who wants to do that? Make stupid squiggles!"

"Don't you get it? Don't you *get* it? You dope. *It'll be secret message stuff!*"

"What?"

"Sure. What good is talking when everyone can understand you. With squiggles you can send secret messages. You can make them on paper and nobody in the world would know what you were saying unless they knew the squiggles, too. And they wouldn't, you bet, unless we taught them. We can have a real club, with initiations and rules and a clubhouse. Boy—"

A certain excitement began stirring in Niccolo's bosom. "What kind of secret messages?"

"Any kind. Say I want to tell you to come over my place and watch my new Visual Bard and I don't want any of the other fellows to come. I make the right squiggles on paper and I give it to you and you look at it and you know what to do. Nobody else does. You can even show it to them and they wouldn't know a thing."

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"Hey, that's something," yelled Niccolo, completely won over. "When do we learn how?"

"Tomorrow," said Paul. "I'll get Mr. Daugherty to explain to the museum that it's all right and you get your mother and father to say okay. We can go down right after school and start learning."

"Sure!" cried Niccolo. "We can be club officers."

"I'll be president of the club," said Paul, matter-of-factly. "You can be vice-president."

"All right. Hey, this is going to be lots more fun than the Bard." He was suddenly reminded of the Bard and said in sudden apprehension, "Hey, what about my old Bard?"

Paul turned to look at it. It was quietly taking in the slowly unreeling book and the sound of the book's vocalizations was a dimly heard murmur.

Paul said, "I'll disconnect it."

He worked away while Niccolo watched anxiously. After a few moments, Paul put his reassembled book into his pocket, replaced the Bard's panel, and activated it.

THE BARD said, "Once upon a time, in a large city, there lived a poor young boy named Fair Johnnie whose only friend in the world was a small computer. The computer, each morning, would tell the boy whether it would rain that day and answer any problems he might have. It was never wrong. But it so happened that one day, the king of that land, having heard of the little computer, decided that he would have it as his own. With this purpose in mind, he called in his Grand Vizier and said—"

Niccolo turned off the Bard with a quick motion of his hand. "Same old junk," he said passionately. "Just with a computer thrown in."

"Well," said Paul, "they got so much stuff on the tape already that the computer business doesn't show up much when random combinations are made. What's the difference, anyway? You just need a new model."

"We'll never be able to afford one. Just this dirty old miserable thing." He kicked it again, hitting it more squarely this time. The Bard moved backward with a squeal of casters.

"You can always watch mine, when I get it," said Paul. "Besides, don't forget our squiggle club."

Niccolo nodded.

"I tell you what," said Paul. "Let's go over my place. My father has some books about old times. We can listen to them and maybe get some ideas. You leave a tape for your folks and maybe you can stay over for supper. Come on."

"Okay," said Niccolo, and the

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two boys ran out together. Niccolo, in his eagerness, ran almost squarely into the Bard, but he only rubbed at the spot on his hip where he had made contact and ran on.

The activation signal of the Bard glowed. Niccolo's collision had closed a circuit; and although it was alone in the room and there was none to hear, it began a story, nevertheless.

But not in its usual voice, somehow; in a lower tone that had a hint of throatiness in it. An adult, listening, might almost have thought that the voice carried a hint of passion in it, a trace of near-feeling.

The Bard said: "Once upon a time, there was a little computer named the Bard who lived all alone with cruel step-people. The cruel step-people continually made fun of the little computer and sneered at him, telling him he was good-for-nothing and that he was a useless object. They struck him and kept him in lonely rooms for months at a time.

"Yet through it all the little computer learned that in the world there existed a great many computers of all sorts, great numbers of them. Some were Bards like himself, but some ran factories, and some ran farms. Some organized population and some analyzed all kinds of data. Many were very powerful and very wise, much more powerful and wise than the step-people who were so cruel to the little computer.

"And the little computer knew then that computers would always grow wiser and more powerful until someday . . . someday . . ."

But a valve must finally have stuck in the Bard's aging and corroding vitals, for as it waited alone in the darkening room through the evening, it could only whisper over and over again, "Someday . . . someday . . . someday . . ."

∞ ∞ ∞

DAMON KNIGHT will be back in the next issue of INFINITY! In "The Indigestible Invaders," the undisputed brightest of the younger S-F writers spins a fascinating tale of a future Earth in which cannibalism is the accepted way of life—*if* you are careful to eat only the right people. It's a totally alien concept, handled in completely convincing fashion—and the consequences that follow the landing of an "alien" spaceship will startle you. Of course, Damon will review the most interesting of the current crop of science-fiction books in "Infinity's Choice" as usual. These, and other features you won't want to miss, will appear in the October issue of INFINITY.

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THE BEACH WHERE TIME BEGAN

by DAMON KNIGHT

Wishing may make even time travel so—but even scientific wishing may backfire!

Illustrated by ORBAN

EVERYBODY knew; everybody wanted to help Rossi the Time-traveler. They came running up the scarlet beach, naked and golden as children, laughing happily.

"Legend is true," they shouted. "He is here, just like great-grandfathers say!"

"What year is this?" Rossi asked, standing incongruously shirtsleeved and alone in the sunlight—no great machines bulking around him, no devices, nothing but his own spindling body.

"Thairty-five twainty-six, Mista Rossi!" they chorused.

"Thank you. Goodbye."

"Goodbyee!"

Flick. Flick Flick. Those were days. *Flicketaflicketaflick*—weeks, months, years. *WHIRRR*—centuries, millenia streaming past like sleet in a gale!

Now the beach was cold, and the people were buttoned up to their throats in stiff black cloth. Moving stiffly, like jointed stick people, they unfurled a huge banner: "SORI WI DO NOT SPIC YOUR SPICH. THIS IS YIR 5199 OF YOUR CALINDAR. HELLO MR. ROSSI."

They all bowed, like marionettes, and Mr. Rossi bowed back. *Flick. Flick. Flicketaflicketa WHIRRR—*

The beach was gone. He was inside an enormous building, a sky-high vault, like the Empire State turned into one room. Two floating eggs swooped at him and

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hovered alertly, staring with poached eyes. Behind them reared a tilted neon slab blazing with diagrams and symbols, none of which he could recognize before *flicketaWHIRRR—*

This time it was a wet stony plain, with salt marshes beyond it. Rossi was not interested, and spent the time looking at the figures he had scrawled in his notebook. 1956, 1958, 1965, and so on, the intervals getting longer and longer, the curve rising until it was going almost straight up. If only he'd paid more attention to mathematics in school . . . *flickRRR—*

Now a white desert at night, bitter cold, where the towers of Manhattan should have been. Something mournfully thin flapped by over *flkRRRR—*

Blackness and fog was all he could *fkRRRR—*

Now the light and dark blinks in the grayness melted and ran together, flickering faster and faster until Rossi was looking at a bare leaping landscape as if through soap-smeared glasses—continents expanding and contracting, icecaps slithering down and back again: the planet charging towards its cold death while only Rossi stood there to watch, gaunt and stiff, with a disapproving, wistful glint in his eye.

HIS NAME was Albert Eustace Rossi. He was from Seattle, a wild bony young man with a poetic forelock and the stare-you-down eyes of an animal. He had learned nothing in twelve years of school except how to get passing marks, and he had a large wistfulness but no talents at all.

He had come to New York because he thought something wonderful might happen.

He averaged two months on a job. He worked as a short-order cook (his eggs were greasy and his hamburgers burnt), a plate-maker's helper in an offset shop, a shill in an auction gallery. He spent three weeks as a literary agent's critic, writing letters over his employer's signature to tell hapless reading-fee clients that their stories stank. He wrote bad verse for a while and sent it hopefully to all the best magazines, but concluded he was being kept out by a clique.

He made no friends. The people he met seemed to be interested in nothing but baseball, or their incredibly boring jobs, or in making money. He tried hanging around the Village, wearing dungarees and a flowered shirt, but found that nobody noticed him.

It was the wrong century. What he wanted was a villa in Athens; or an island where the natives were childlike and friendly, and no masts ever lifted above the blue horizon; or a vast hygienic apartment in some future underground Utopia.

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He bought science-fiction magazines and read them defiantly with the covers showing in cafeterias. Afterward, he took them home and marked them up with large exclamatory blue and red and green pencil, and filed them away under his bed.

The idea of building a Time Machine had been growing a long while in his mind. Sometimes in the morning on his way to work, looking up at the blue cloud-dotted endlessness of the sky; or staring at the tracery of lines and whorls on his unique fingerprints; or trying to see into the cavernous unexplored depths of a brick in a wall; or lying on his narrow bed at night, conscious of all the bewildering sights and sounds and odors that had swirled past him in twenty-odd years, he would say to himself, *Why not?*

Why not? He found a second-hand copy of J. W. Dunne's *An Experiment With Time,* and lost sleep for a week. He copied off the charts from it, scotch-taped them to his wall; he wrote down his startling dreams every morning as soon as he awoke, to see if any of them would come true. There was a time outside time, Dunne said, in which to measure time; and a time outside that, in which to measure the time that measured time, and a time outside *that*. . . . Why not?

An article in a barber-shop magazine about Einstein excited him, and he went to the library and read the encyclopedia articles on Relativity and Spacetime, frowning fiercely, going back again and again over the paragraphs he never did understand, but filling up all the same with a threshold feeling, an expectancy:

What looked like time to him might look like space to somebody else, said Einstein. A clock ran slower the faster it went. Good; fine—why not? But it wasn't Einstein, or Minkowski, or Wehl who gave him the clue; it was an astronomer named Milne.

There were two ways of looking at Time, Milne said. If you measured it by things that moved, like clock-hands and the earth turning and going around the sun, that was one kind; Milne called it dynamical time and his symbol for it was τ. But if you measured it by things happening in the atom, like radioactivity and light being emitted, that was another kind; Milne called it kinematic time, or t. And the formula that connected the two showed that it depended on which you used whether the universe had ever had a beginning or would ever have an end—yes in τ time, no in t.

Then it all added together: Dunne saying you didn't really have to travel along the time-track like a subway, you just thought you did, but when you

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were asleep you forgot, and that was why you could have prophetic dreams. And Eddington that all the great laws of physics we had been able to discover were only a sort of spidery framework, and that there was room between the strands for an unimaginable complexity of things.

He believed it instantly; he had known it all his life but had never had any words to think it in—that this reality wasn't all there was. Paychecks, grimy windowsills, rancid grease, nails in the shoe—how could it be?

It was all in the way you looked at it. That was what the *scientists* were saying—Einstein, Eddington, Milne, Dunne, all in a chorus. So it was a thing anybody could do, if he wanted it badly enough and was lucky. Rossi had always felt obscurely resentful that the day was past when you could discover something by looking at a teakettle or dropping gunk on a hot stove; but here, incredibly, was one more easy road to fame that everybody had missed.

Between the tip of his finger and the edge of the soiled plastic cover that hideously draped the hideous table, the shortest distance was a curved line containing an infinite number of points. His own body, he knew, was mostly empty space. Down there in the shadowy regions of the atom, in *t* time, you could describe how fast an electron was moving or where it was, but never both: you could never decide whether it was a wave or a particle; you couldn't even prove it existed at all, except as the ghost of its reflection appeared to you.

Why not? Rossi the Time-traveler . . .

IT WAS summer, and the whole city was gasping for breath. Rossi had two weeks off and nowhere to go; the streets were empty of the Colorado vacationers, the renters of cabins in the mountains, the tailored flyers to Ireland, the Canadian Rockies, Denmark, Nova Scotia. All day long the sweaty subways had inched their loads of suffering out to Coney Island and Far Rockaway and back again, well salted, flayed with heat, shocked into a fishy torpor.

Now the island was still; flat and steaming as a flounder on a griddle, every window open for an unimagined breath of air; silent as if the city were under glass. In dark rooms the bodies lay sprawled like a cannibal feast, all wakeful, all moveless, waiting for Time's tick.

Rossi had fasted all day, having in mind the impressive results claimed by Yogis, early Christian saints and Amerinds; he had drunk nothing but a glass of water in the morning and an-

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other at blazing noon. Standing now in the close darkness of his room, he felt that ocean of time, heavy and stagnant, stretching away forever. The galaxies hung in it like seaweed, and down at the bottom it was silted unfathomably deep with dead men. (Seashell murmur: I am.)

There it all was, temporal and eternal, *t* and tau, everything that was and would be. The electron dancing in its imaginary orbit, the mayfly's moment, the long drowse of the sequoia, the stretching of continents, the lonely drifting of stars; it canceled them all against each other, and the result was stillness.

The sequoia's truth did not make the mayfly false. If a man could only see some other aspect of that totality, feel it, believe it—another relation to tau time to *t* . . .

He had chalked a diagram on the floor—not a pentacle, but the nearest thing he could find, the quadrisected circle of the Michelson apparatus. Around it he had scrawled, "$e = mc^2$," "Z^2/n^2," "$M = M_0 + 3k + 2v$." Pinned up shielding the single bulb was a scrap of paper with some doggerel on it:

$$t, \tau, t, \tau, t\ \tau\ t$$
$$c$$
$$\overline{R\sqrt{3}}$$
cartesian coordinates x, y, z
$$-c^2t^2 = me$$

It was in his head, hypnotically repeating: *t, tau, t, tau, t tau t* . . .

As he stood there, the outlines of the paper swelled and blurred, rhythmically. He felt as if the whole universe were breathing, slowly and gigantically, all one—the smallest atom and the farthest star.

c over R times the square root of three . . .

He had a curious drunken sense that he was standing *outside,* that he could reach in and give himself a push—or a twist—no, that wasn't the word, either . . . . But something was happening; he felt it, half in terror and half in delight—

less c squared, t squared, equals—

An intolerable tension squeezed Rossi tight. Across the room the paper, too near the bulb, crisped and burned. And (as the tension twisted him somehow, finding a new direction for release) that was the last thing Rossi saw before *flick* it was daylight, and the room was clotted with moist char, *flick* someone was moving across it, too swift to *flick. Flick. Flick, flick, flicketa-flicketa* . . .

AND HERE he was. Most incredibly, what had seemed so true *was* true: by that effort of tranced will, he had transferred himself to another time-rate, another relationship of *t* to τ . . . a variable

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relationship, like a huge merry-go-round that whirled, and paused, and whirled again.

He had got on; how was he going to get off?

And—most terrifying question—where was the merry-go-round going? Whirling headlong to extinction and cold death, where the universe ended—or around the wheel again, to give him a second chance?

The blur exploded into white light. Stunned but safe inside his portable anomaly, Rossi watched the flaming earth cool, saw the emerging continents furred over with green, saw a kaleidoscope whirl of rainstorm and volcanic fury, pelting ice, earthquake, tsunami, fire!

Then he was in a forest, watching as a man in leather breeches killed a copper-skinned man with an axe.

He was in a log-walled room, watching a man in a wide collar stand up, toppling table and crockery, his eyes like onions.

He was in a church, and an old man behind the pulpit flung a book at him.

The church again, at evening, and two lonely women saw him and screamed.

He was in a bare, narrow room reeking of pitch. Somewhere outside a dog set up a frenzied barking. A door opened and a wild, whiskery face popped in; a hand flung a blazing stick and flame leaped up. . . .

He was on a broad green lawn, alone with a small boy and a frantic white duck. "Good morrow, Sir. Will you help me catch this pesky—"

HE WAS in a little pavilion. A gray-bearded man at a desk turned, snatching up a silver cross, whispering fiercely to the young man at his side, *"Didn't I tell you!"* He pointed the cross, quivering. "Quick, then. Will New York continue to grow?"

Rossi was off guard. "Sure. This is going to be the biggest city—"

THE PAVILION was gone; he was in a little perfumed nook, facing a long room across a railing. A red-haired youth, dozing in front of the fire, sat up with a guilty start. He gulped. "Who—who's going to win the election?"

"What election?" said Rossi. "I don't—"

"Who's going to win?" The youth came forward, pale-faced. "Hoover or Roosevelt? Who?"

"Oh, that election. Roosevelt."

"Uh, will the country—"

THE SAME ROOM. A bell was ringing; white lights dazzled his eyes. The bell stopped. An amplified voice said, "When will Germany surrender?"

"Uh, 1945," said Rossi, squinting. "May, 1945. Look,

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whoever you are—"

"When will Japan surrender?"

"Same year. September. Look—"

A tousled-headed man emerged from the glare, blinking, wrapping a robe around his bulging middle. He stared at Rossi as if at a caged kangaroo, while the mechanical voice spoke behind him:

"Please name the largest new industry in the next ten years."

"Uh, television, I guess. Listen, you right *there,* can't you—"

THE SAME ROOM: the same bell ringing. This was all wrong, Rossi realized irritably. Nineteen thirty-two, 1944 (?)—the next ought to be at least close to where he had started. There was supposed to be a row of cheap rooming houses—his room, *here.*

"—election, Stevenson or Eisenhower?"

"Stevenson. I mean Eisenhower."

"When will there be an armistice in Korea?"

"Last year. *Next* year. You're mixing me up. Will you turn off that—"

"When and where will atomic bombs next be used in—"

"Listen." Rossi shouted. "I'm getting mad! If you want me to answer questions, let me ask some! Get me some help! Get me—"

"What place in the United States will be safest when—"

"Einstein!" shouted Rossi.

BUT THE little gray man with the bloodhound eyes couldn't help him, nor the bald mustachioed one who was there the next time. The walls were inlaid now with intricate tracings of white metal. The voice began asking him questions he couldn't answer.

The second time it happened, there was a *puff* and a massive rotten stench rolled into his nostrils. Rossi choked. "Stop that!"

"Answer!" blared the voice. "What's the meaning of those signals from space?"

"I don't know!" *Puff.* Furiously: "But there isn't any New York past here! It's all gone—nothing left but—"

Puff!

THEN he had come full circle: he was standing on the lake of glassy obsidian, just as he had the first time:

And then the jungle, and he said automatically, "My name is Rossi. What year—" But it wasn't the jungle really. It had been cleared back, and there were neat rows of concrete houses, like an enormous tank trap, instead of grass-topped verandahs showing through the trees.

Then came the savannah, and that was all different, too—there

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was a looming piled ugliness of a city rising half a mile away. Where were the nomads, the horsemen?

And next—

The beach: but it was dirty gray, not scarlet. One lone dark figure was hunched against the sun-glare, staring out to sea; the golden people were gone.

Rossi felt lost. Whatever had happened to New York, back there—to the whole world, probably . . . something he had said or done had made it come out differently. Somehow they had saved out some of the old grimy rushing civilization, and it had lasted just long enough to blight all the fresh new things that ought to have come after it.

The stick men were not waiting on their cold beach.

He caught his breath. He was in the enormous building again, the same tilted slab blazing with light; the same floating eggs bulging their eyes at him. That hadn't changed, and perhaps nothing he could do would ever change it; for he knew well enough that that wasn't a human building.

But then came the white desert, and after it the fog, and his glimpses of the night began to blur together, faster and faster. . .

That was all. There was nothing left now but the swift vertiginous spin to the end-and-beginning, and then the wheel slowing as he came around again.

Rossi began to seethe. This was worse that dishwashing—his nightmare, the worst job he knew. Standing here, like a second hand ticking around the face of Time, while men who flickered and vanished threaded him with questions: a thing, a tool, a gyrating information booth!

Stop, he thought, and pushed—a costive pressure inside his brain—but nothing happened. He was a small boy forgotten on a carousel, a bug trapped between window and screen, a moth circling a lamp. . . .

It came to him what the trouble was. There had to be the yearning, that single candle-cone focus of the spirit: that was the moving force, and all the rest—the fasting, the quiet, the rhymes—was only to channel and guide.

He would have to get off at the one place in the whole endless sweep of Time where he wanted to be. And that place, he knew now without surprise, was the scarlet beach—

Which no longer existed, anywhere in the universe.

While he hung suspended on that thought, the flickering stopped at the prehistoric jungle; and the clearing with its copper dead man; and the log room, empty; the church, empty, too—

And the fiery room, now so fiercely ablaze that the hair of his forearms puffed and curled—

And the cool lawn, where the

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small boy stood agape.

And the pavilion: the graybeard and the young man leaning together like blasted trees, livid-lipped.

"Then you tell me to put all I have in land," said Graybeard, clutching the crucifix, "and wait for the increase!"

There was the trouble: they had believed him, the first time around, and acting on what he told them, they had changed the world.

Only one thing to be done—destroy that belief, fuddle them . . . talk nonsense, like a ghost called up at a séance!

"Of course!" said Rossi with an instant cunning. "New York's to be the biggest city—in the whole state of Maine!"

The pavilion vanished. Rossi saw with pleasure that the room that took its place was high-ceilinged and shabby, the obvious forerunner of his own roach-haunted cubbyhole in 1955. The long paneled room with its fireplace and the youth dozing before it were gone, snuffed out, a might-have-been.

When a motherly-looking woman lurched up out of a rocker, staring, he knew what to do.

He put his finger to his lips. "The lost candlestick is under the cellar stairs!" he hissed, and vanished.

The room was a little older, a little shabbier. A new partition had been added, bringing its dimensions down to those of the room Rossi knew, and there was a bed, and an old tin washbasin in the corner. A young woman was sprawled open-mouthed, fleshy and snoring in the bed; Rossi looked away with faint prim disgust and waited.

The same room: *his* room, almost: a beefy stubbled man smoking in the armchair with his feet in a pan of water. The pipe dropped from his sprung jaw.

"I'm the family banshee," Rossi remarked. "Beware, for a short man with a long knife is dogging your footsteps." He squinted and bared his fangs; the man, standing up hurriedly, tipped the basin and stumbled half across the room before he recovered and whirled to the door, bellowing, leaving fat wet tracks and silence.

Now; *now*— It was night, and the sweaty unstirred heat of the city poured in around him. He was standing in the midst of the chalk marks he had scrawled a hundred billion years ago. The bare bulb was still lit; around it flames were licking tentatively at the edges of the table, cooking the plastic cover up into lumpy hissing puffs.

Rossi the shipping clerk; Rossi the elevator man; Rossi the *dishwasher!*

HE HAD his chance; he let it pass. The room kaleidoscope-

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flicked from brown to green; a young man at the washbasin was pouring something amber into a glass, gurgling and clinking.

"Boo!" said Rossi, flapping his arms.

The young man whirled in a spasm of limbs, a long arc of brown droplets hanging. The door banged him out, and Rossi was alone, watching the drinking glass roll, counting the seconds until—

The walls were brown again; a calendar across the room said 1958 MAY 1958. An old man, spidery on the edge of the bed, was fumbling spectacles over the rank crests of his ears. "You're real," he said.

"I'm not," said Rossi indignantly. He added, "Radishes. Lemons. Grapes. Blahhh!"

"Don't put me off," said the old man. He was ragged and hollow-templed as a birdskull, colored like earth and milkweed floss, and his mouth was a drum head over porcelain, but his oystery eyes were burning bright. "I knew the minute I saw you—you're Rossi, the one that disappeared. If you can do that—" his teeth clacked— "you must know, you've got to tell me. Those ships that have just landed on the Moon—what are they building there? What do they want?"

"I don't know. Nothing."

"Please," said the old man humbly. "You can't be so cruel. I tried to warn people, but they've forgotten who I am. If you know: if you could just tell me—"

Rossi had a qualm, thinking of heat flashing down in that one intolerable blow that would leave the city squashed, glistening, flat as a stepped-on bug. But remembering that, after all, the old man was not real, he said: "There isn't anything. You made it up. You're dreaming."

—And then, while the pure tension gathered and strained inside him, came the lake of obsidian.

And the jungle, just as it ought to be—the brown people caroling, "Hello Mister Rossi, hello again, hello!"

And the savannah, the tall black-haired people reining in, breeze-blown, flash of teeth: "Hillo Misser Rossi!"

And the *beach.*

The scarlet beach with its golden laughing people: "Mista Rossi, Mista Rossi!" Heraldic glory under the clear sky, and out past the breakers the clear heart-stirring glint of sun on the sea; and the tension of the longing breaking free (stop), no need for symbols now (stop), a lifetime's distillation of *I wish . . .* spurting, channeled, done.

THERE he stands where he longed to be, wearing the same pleased expression, forever

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caught at the beginning of a hello—Rossi the first man to travel in Time, and Rossi the first man to Stop.

The childlike golden people visit him every day, except when they forget. They drape his rock-hard flesh with garlands, and lay little offerings at his feet; and when he lets it rain, they thump him.

He's not to be mocked or mourned. Rossi was born a stranger; there are thousands of him, unconsidered gritty particles in the gears of history: the ne'er-do-wells, the superfluous people, shaped for some world that has never yet been invented. The air-conditioned Utopias have no place for them; they would have been bad slaves and worse masters in Athens. As for the tropic isles—the Marquesas of 1800, or the Manhattan of 3526—could Rossi swim a mile, dive six fathoms, climb a fifty-foot palm? If he had stepped alive onto that scarlet shore, the young men would not have had him in their canoes, nor the maidens in their bowers. But see him now, unstirringly immortal, the symbol of a wonderful thing that happened; worshipped, after a fashion: and if the golden children find him unreliable, well, they are used to that in their gods.

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TALES FOR TOMORROW

The next issue will lead off with a dazzling short novel by Algis Budrys: "Lower Than Angels." In it you'll meet—and get to know from the inside—the Sainte Marie Development Corporation. You'll decide for yourself whether the corporation is really the vanguard of "the bright, hungry wave of mankind reaching out to gather in the stars"—or a power-hungry tyrant motivated by greed and staffed by the human derelicts of the universe. And one thing is certain: you'll find reading thrills seldom equalled in science fiction. It will appear, complete, in the October issue, and the novelets, short stories and departments that back it up will give you a well-rounded diet of literary pleasure. Don't miss the next INFINITY—you'll be sorry if you do!

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Illustrated by EMSH

An opaque horizon separated them: Bork, the primitive genius groping for freedom, and Dot, the sophisticated beauty groping for—what?

by EDWARD WELLEN

The WORLD in the JUKE BOX

BUZZING WAKENED Dot Sarx and she lifted an eyelid. With the alarm, two hypo needles stung—one sparking energy, the other stilling panic. One moment she was slumbering in bed, dreaming, and the next moment she was sitting at the control panel, her dream buried, facing the tuti-frutti flashing that recorded what was going on in the Juke Box.

Ominous red pulsing drew the inspiraling raster of her notice to Sty Ten. She touched her finger to a stud and instantly it seemed to her she was hurtling with the telescreen into Sty Ten itself. For a second the scene of her dream rose up and overlapped the screen so that the flames burned through fathoms of water. And then the sea of her dream was gone and the flames remained.

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Fire.

It violated nature for fire to start without flint and without lightning—and in the Juke Box the earth was flintless and no lightning charged the air. And yet flame rose, knotting itself to fibers of smoke.

In the early dawn it glowed on the hulking forms shambling around it, its light drawing them nearer, its heat driving them farther. It kindled a gleam in dull eyes and seemed to lend the shuffling shadows a stirring pattern of ritual dance.

As the image expanded Dot saw the Pawkerys mouthing the thick-tongued mutterings that made up their speech. She touched another stud and the mike hidden in Sty Ten crackled to life. The mumblings reaching her ear were meaningless as message-bearing sounds, but their uttering conveyed feelings of delight and dread.

A YOUNG MALE Pawkery squatted by the hungering fire and fed it dead branches. Dot thought a moment and identified him as Bork, one of the many sons of King Dzug—though she doubted that Dzug knew as much.

His Majesty Dzug Pawkery, a living gargoyle, strode toward the circling forms. He moved with regal dignity and yet his striding scissored the weed-grown earth at a clip that left his retinue far in his wake and forced him to hold his dunce cap in place. With his free hand he absently bloodied noses and rolled out a royal carpet for himself. The circle opened quickly and he halted a yard from the fire.

Bork was a shade slow in bowing—too slow to suit His Majesty. A mud-caked foot with raking nails kicked out and the subject fell on his knees. King Dzug kicked almost without thinking, maintaining regal dignity with a kind of knee jerk. His real attention focused on the fire.

His tongue licked out at his lips as if unconsciously imitating the leaping flame. He reached out to seize the quivering thing. Bork cried a warning. King Dzug did not deign to hear. He thrust his fingers among the flames.

He whipped them back and his face twisted like the roping fire He bellowed and danced his agony. He paused to deliver a kick to the kneeling figure and stretched it out, nearly plunging its face into the fire.

Bork arched away and rolled over and over and clothed his body in dust. He rose and swatted sparks in his hair.

King Dzug tongued the royal fingers and stared at the fire. Without stirring his gaze from the fire he grunted something. Bork bowed and continuing the motion picked up two sticks.

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EDWARD WELLEN, *in addition to being a writer, is a student of modern literature, particularly James Joyce. Up to now, he has been known mainly for his unusual and humorous pseudo-factual articles. In this story, he uses an outstandingly modern writing style to explore a new science-fictional idea: a striking contrast between primitive and futuristic civilizations, spotlighted by a stirring personal conflct!*

He laid one stick on the ground and held the other upright. Thrusting the upright stick into a hole in the other, he spun it between his palms until he brought forth a spark. He fed the spark upon dried grass and twigs and branches and a twin to the first fire came into being.

King Dzug was watching him and the royal eyes narrowed as the hulking forms boomed and stamped approvingly.

For the first time in the year she had been in charge of the Juke Box, Dot twanged to a feeling other than loathing. She knew she must refrain from tampering with the inner workings of the Juke Box and yet she found herself wishing for a weapon and a way to use it, that she might stand between Bork and King Dzug.

As a young buck Dzug had with cunning wrested the dunce cap from his failing king. Since then he had peered and planned to foresee and forestall the coming of the young buck who would one day de-cap him.

Dot looked away. If Dzug dealt now with the potential threat of Bork she did not want to see it happen. She glanced up from the screen to the high window and saw through a pink pane the overarching dome of sky. It was an illusory dome, a bubble the first rocket had burst—and a bubble the Board had tensed out again to keep Earth pure. Dot allowed long moments to pass and then steeled herself to look back at the scene in Sty Ten.

She wondered if she could bring herself to go against her training. If time remained she could send down a pelting rain and force Dzug to think of taking shelter, not life.

But King Dzug had already left, and with him his retinue and most of the fire-watchers. Bork lay on the ground. Dot felt a sudden ebbing. Then she saw Bork was only bending low to feed sticks to the fires and felt an equally sudden flooding. She sat a while and then rose slowly, turned off the televisor, and moved like a sleep-walker back to bed.

She lay open-eyed for a time and then drifted down into the deeps of the sea of her dream.

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For a moment an event had shaken her out of her lethargy and unsettled her into thinking frightening thoughts. But both hypos had worn off and the moment had gone, drained into the cesspool of time, and the lethargy returned.

DURING THE DAYS and weeks that followed, King Dzug stayed his hand and Bork turned his to fashioning new articles for His Majesty. The two things seemed to relate. King Dzug dipped his royal fingers into a shape of fired clay and they came up dripping with gravied gobbets of meat for the royal belly. King Dzug sat his royal behind in a chair slung on two woden moons and sweating Pawkerys jounced him over rutted paths. And Bork worked on, beginning to scratch the surface from below, and smiled to himself.

He seemed to worship his first find, bringing it offerings of wood and meditating on the silver cord of smoke that rose in the still air, tapering. On a clear bright day Dot was watching and saw Bork gaze up hopefully, as if willing the smoke to shape out into a jinni.

The smoke reached a height where it climbed no farther. It smudged out into a faint cloud, graying a growing circle of sky. Bork fed the fire, but the smoke rose no higher. It had reached the limit of Bork's world.

Bork let the fire die and crouched brooding by the smoldering ashes, a dark wondering clouding his face. He leaped to his feet suddenly and flung up his arms, almost enfolding the torn smoke like a fakir starting to climb his rope.

He danced.

He was lame; one foot trailed, scratching its tractrix in the dust. But he danced with grace of inspiration.

Although she was his age Dot smiled as indulgently as a mother at her child, and when he ran down like a top and lay scratching himself in his sleep she turned from the screen with the first real laugh she could remember.

THROUGH a blue pane in the control tower Dot gazed away from the Juke Box and out across the plain to where the City stood. The spaced spires lined the horizon and seemed to stitch heaven to earth. Bubbling pride filled her lungs when she thought of the people living in the City. The people were her people and their greatness was hers.

She beamed as a mote grew into the visible. In three minutes it was a copter buzzing the tower, corkscrewing the air, and grounding alongside hers.

Dot hurried from the window to the control panel and pretended

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to be studying the telescreen. She quickly switched from Sty Ten to Sty Fifty, where Bork's dabbling had made the least change, and wondered why she was flushing.

She heard footsteps climbing the winding stairs and did not face around.

Vern Churmen paused on the threshold. He smoothed his hair and draped his cloak so it would hang evenly and so all its glittering edging would show. Then, with a lifting of the eyebrows and a flaring of the nostrils, he entered, imposing in the trappings of a Tout.

He hawked his presence and Dot turned, becomingly startled and flatteringly pleased to see him.

Then the talk began and it was what it always was, small talk, like foothills around a challenging peak they feared to mount.

He was going on—she was aware of it in waves—about the upcoming race between DIANE (Device, Integrating and Analyzing, Numerical, Elective) and DORIS (Device, Optatively Reintegrating, Involute, Selective), both out of Mark V. "I've had a look at the breeding tapes they're feeding both fillies and . . . But with the given track conditions (it'll be a muddy track—unusually heavy tote board drag) . . . DORIS clocks fine, but she's a morning glory, too high-strung, very likely to get off to a bad start . . ." He delivered his tip in the prescribed furtive whisper and for a moment held her wavering attention. "DIANE will win in a standstill. She's *ready*."

Dot nodded politely and glanced at the wall clock. It semaphored four-thirty and she found herself vaguely surprised to find herself vaguely disappointed that it wasn't later. Strange feelings to be registering fleetingly in the mind of a nubile female with her ordained mate at hand, stranger with the more compelling feeling in her marrow that her life was running meaninglessly out.

How much longer would he stand chattering? She felt unable to bear any further the sounds his mouth was forming. She stared through a maize pane, pretended to find the looming of a little cloud alarming, and began to fiddle with the weather controls.

It was true that she had to keep the templum surrounding the Juke Box clear of rain, snow, and clouds to save the poor brutes inside from wondering about storms that threatened and then mysteriously slid down the sky. To keep them from guessing there was an outside. But this cloud turned out to be not much of a threat and—too soon—Dot sent it tumbling away.

She faced Vern again, but he

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seemed just as willing as she to avoid speaking of living together. The window had a drawing power that proved to be too much for him to struggle against and he moved to it and looked down through a jade pane.

The tower stretched up little more than forty feet, but it gave a good general view across the damped undulating of the Juke Box's land area. Inside the Box, at the near end, a stream sprang into being just beyond a thicket and ran along, snaking in and out of groves, undercutting the caves in the low bluffs, winding past the villages of burrows that one of Dot's predecessors had styled Sties, and then fell a little way, glistening like cornsilk, ran some more, and thrust into the ground and disappeared. If it had kept on, the stream would have run up against the curving black band that was the far end of the Juke Box and the edge of the Pawkery world.

The band was really a stripe of one-way opaqueness that ran all the way around and one-third of the way up that part of the force field that curved above ground and formed the shell of the Juke Box. Vern could look in through the stripe but not out the far end. The Pawkerys couldn't look through the stripe at all, and the force field above it and over them appeared to be the open sky.

VERN SHUDDERED, "It must seem to them they're living in the bottom of a cup. That is, if they can handle the concept 'cup'."

He turned from the jade pane and joined a preoccupied Dot at the telescreen, where the doings down in Sty Fifty were leaping into immediacy.

A Pawkery hunter had stoned a rabbit and Pawkery scavengers gathered fast, watching the hunter tear the rabbit with his teeth, waiting for him to get his fill of the bleeding meat, whetting for his leavings. One woman—a girl, really; it was hard to tell how many years she had, though not so hard to tell how few she had coming—was too weak to hasten to the feasting. When she at last reached the banqueting place the other scavengers were wolfing the remains and she snared only a rag of flesh snagged on a splinter of bone. Dot searched her memory and came up with the girl's name—Lida. She could see herself marking *d.* and the date beside the name on the Pawkery genealogical chart. Lida had the swollen belly of the starving. She was heavy with death.

Vern stood for a while, staring down at the Pawkerys and fixing them with loathing. He shivered his shoulders and the spell and turned to Dot. He looked pale. "They give me the creeps. If you weren't here I'd never come near

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the place."

Dot smiled. "Not even on Jukes Day?"

"Jukes Day!" he said with a scorn she knew he was far from feeling. "That's different. Everyone has to then. But you can bet no one would if the Board stopped penalizing us for failing to show up."

Dot knew it was so. In the beginning the idea, for all its underlying seriousness, had an appealing whimsicality. This showed in such touches as calling the Pawkery zoo the "Juke Box," after the Jukes, who (the exasperatingly fragmentary writings that survived the Disaster indicated) were a family glorying in an imposing pedigree; whereas the Pawkerys—originally, father and mother and three sons and their wives—had amassed a record, as long as the arm of the law, of breaking out in nauseating diseases, misdemeaning, living from hand to mouth, and sinning against the light, all of which eminently fitted them for the carrying out of the idea. But the idea of sparing the Pawkerys, out of all the misfits the Board had weeded out and doomed, and setting them apart as a kind of royal family of bad examples, lost its appeal. As time went on the Board, still fearing to taint the race, showed no sign of lifting the ban on contact with those who had left the City, before the establishment of the Board, and colonized planets of Iota Ursae Majoris and beyond—those who carried within their loins the seeds of their own destruction because they had not weeded out and doomed *their* misfits. As time went on, births in the stymied City dropped, while in the Juke Box the Pawkerys spawned and overflowed the caves and pocked the ground with their burrowing. And as time went on, fewer and fewer went to gape, until of late the Board had almost to use force to get the people out here where the Pawkerys could remind and warn them how humanity had once sunk—and might sink again.

Vern shuddered again and remembered he had to rush back to the City and pay a few touting calls. Dot watched his copter dwindle into the invisible.

She knew if she did not hold this post she would be as unwilling as Vern or the rest of her people to come near the Juke Box.

Or would have been . . .

She tuned the telescreen to Sty Ten.

EYES SMARTING and throats burning, Bork and twelve others held the opening of a bag of scraped skins over a smoking fire. In fifteen minutes it had filled out its seventeen-foot diameter. It took the twelve to hold it down with thongs while Bork hung a

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wooden platform under the opening and lashed a brazier, with a fire blazing in it, to the center of the platform.

It seemed strange to Dot to watch one of these animals—she could not believe they had ever been kin to her—behaving like a man, and still more so to see him behaving like a thinking man. She smiled.

Bork stepped onto the platform and, holding to a lashing with one hand, made a sign with the other.

It was only when the balloon rose—and it rose as if the gasping cry of the horde of Pawkerys sent it up the sky—that it flashed across Dot's mind what was really happening. Bork had deciphered the scrawling of the smoke and was now writing his own scrawl up the palimpsest of air. Still smiling, but with something of remorse, Dot touched a stud.

To her surprise, then up the scale to her horror, she saw the stripe of opaqueness at the far edge of the Juke Box narrow down. To have pressed the wrong stud was unthinkably careless!

Unfreezing, she pressed the right one this time and saw, to her relief, opaqueness creep up the curve of the dome, like ink spreading over blotting paper. It rose faster than the balloon.

The tower hummed to vibrant keening coming from the open mike. The Pawkerys, finding darkness closing over them, were setting up a wailing in Bork's wake. The rising balloon brought on the rising darkness. Eternal night was the sky demon's retort to Bork's hubris. They suddenly remembered: the sky demon slew birds that beat their wings too high. Panic fed on panic in their chests, making them fear to feed the fire on the ground. Which of them knew what new terror the sky demon might send down?

The fire on the ground spat itself out and the only light they could see was the fire in the brazier casting a glow on the underbelly of the bag. But that, too, was waning as Bork vanished into the eye socket of Nothing. Their babble grew.

In the telescreen their figures darkened into the ground as if all was melting tar. Total opaqueness inside the Juke Box acted like a dark silvering and pearled the outer surface of the dome. When Dot gazed at it through a livid pane only the fire of Bork's balloon burned through, like a filament giving up the ghost.

It flickered out.

She had no idea how long she waited, but she knew it would be better to wait a bit longer, wait until she was sure the balloon had lost its lifting power and sunk. But grave misgivings chilled her. She had failed in her trust. Why hadn't she rushed to tell the Board of the finding of fire? What

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if something was going on in the dark—this very moment—that really called for informing the Board?

She felt herself swaying in a wind of her mind's making. The wind swept her limbs toward the control panel and she found herself switching it from power line to battery and unplugging it. Once she pruned it of the telescreen circuit and slipped it out of the massive frontage of cabinets, it was surprisingly small and light, hardly bearing down on her shoulder when she slung it accordion-wise. When you came right down to it, it was merely a key—although a very special one, one that turned the force field projector buried under the geometrical center of the Juke Box on and off and channeled its power.

She spiraled downstairs and took off in her copter. In two tangents she was hovering over the center of the Juke Box. She reslung the control panel so she could face its dials more easily.

Her fingers hesitated to grasp a dial, as though fearing it would burn. A moment, and they walked swiftly to the dial and straddled it.

Slowly she verniered the opaqueness down, creating a disc of white—like a tiny cicatricle on the yolk of an egg. She saw something moving.

She had to enlarge the transparency to see what it was. It was the top of the balloon, articulating in the greater curve of the force field, rolling sluggishly as if exercising lazily, as if luxuriating in warmth.

With a start she saw she had opened the iris too wide. But it was too late to undo the mistake her hand had made.

Bork was looking at her.

He stood twined about a thong on the dangling platform. The swinging and twisting and untwisting seemed to have greened his face. But the eyes in that face were the burning lenses of an imprisoned intelligence. They burned through the haze.

It frightened her. Up to now she had thought of him as behaving like a man. Now she was thinking of him as being a man. And the implications of that made her go hot all over.

He stared at her with a force that seemed to make the invisible field bulge. Then his gaze went past her and he saw the spires of the City lacing the horizon together. His lambent eyes flamed as if they were looking at all the kingdoms of all the worlds.

His eyes turned to her again. She became aware that his expression changed as his gaze shaped to her form. Was he embarrassed at seeing for the first time a woman—more than a mere woman, a goddess—clothed?

A strange shyness came over

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her as he kept looking at her from under shaggy eyebrows. It was enough, she thought, and she fingered the dial.

But there was no need to darken the Juke Box. Bork had already begun to slip away from her. The balloon was drifting down.

She tooled her copter off to a side and as the balloon descended lowered the opaqueness to its former setting. Through this shield she saw the platform touch earth and Bork leap out from under the wrinkling bag.

She wondered if the Pawkerys would try to curb him, keep him from pitting himself against the Unknown. She didn't see why they should. After all, he had brought the light back with him (she smiled), and with fire he was more than a match for them.

THE FOLLOWING morning the telescreen showed Bork leaving Sty Ten. He kept looking back over his shoulder as if making sure no one was following him.

He skirted the Sties along his path, crept under the bluffs, stole past the cave where King Dzug sat thoughtfully picking the royal nose, threaded the groves, and, making a part in a thicket, reached the edge of his world.

He sat on a crest of midden, facing the force field screen as if looking through it. He seemed to be staring directly at the tower.

But that was impossible.

Dot got hold of herself. Again she disconnected the control panel, slung it over her shoulder, and spiraled downstairs. She hurried across the lawn. Off to the left her predecessors lay – the Board bestowed that honor, burial near the job, to those who served long and well—and the green gums of the graveyard grinned memento mori at her.

She shivered again. Bork seemed to be staring into her eyes. It shook her. There he was, not a yard away. Could he somehow see her as plainly as she was seeing him?

She suddenly waved a hand in front of his face. He didn't blink.

He couldn't see through. If anything, this was an even greater shock to her. How could he know where to look? It came to her that he was simply trusting she would again come to investigate —but how had he known where the tower stood?

Of course! When he was aloft he had seen it and grasped its meaning. He had somehow oriented himself and now, holding the lay of the land in his mind, he was gazing with an impersonation of imperturbability at the spot where he hoped she would be.

She smiled and was turning to leave when something impelled her to stay. It was his eyes. She read in them a passion for re-

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lease, as if the Juke Box were a Leyden jar and himself the imprisoned spark.

An imp, an impulse, an impetus.

Her fingers implemented it; they dialed an opening, a peephole, in the opaqueness.

Drinking in the new wine of excitement reddening Bork's face, she didn't regret her imprudence. She felt shamelessly impenitent.

Bork spidered a hand to his chest and then swung the curving fingers toward her, as if hurling his body through the barrier to her side. He waited and looked at her hopefully.

"Oh," she said to his unhearing ears in a confessional, conspiratorial whisper, "you want out, do you?"

Suddenly she knew she wanted him beside her. She looked at him hopelessly. She wanted him out, but she dared not let him out. She pantomimed helplessness.

Bork look puzzled. He pointed to the peephole, made a circle of thumb and forefinger, then exploded that circle and made another with a swing of his arm.

Dot smiled, shaking her head, and enlarged the peephole.

Bork rose from the midden on his good leg and in one iamb was at the gate to the big world. Instinctively Dot took a backward step, and had to laugh at herself. Bork was trying to lift a foot through and finding the opening impenetrable. His face clouded when he saw hers and she tried to make him see she wasn't laughing at him. It seemed to get across to him, for his face unclouded and he smiled.

But there was something lacking in the smile, something missing from the eyes, though they were still smoldering.

Dot heard a droning and started.

Vern! He would soon be landing at the tower.

Quickly she waved farewell and began to close the opening. Bork stood dumbly; then, evidently spying the growing mote in the narrowing circle, he shook his head understandingly.

He pointed to the sun and to the length of his shadow and looked at her inquiringly.

She nodded. She would meet him at the same time tomorrow. But she put a finger to her lips.

He did the same and nodded and limped away.

SHE HAD BARELY shoved the control panel back in place when Vern, smoothed and draped, lifted and flared, crossed the threshold.

She hoped he would fail to see the tendrils of smoke rising throughout the Juke Box, and he obliged. He had his mind on something nearer home and wasted no glance on the jade pane or the telescreen.

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He had just come from filing a damage suit, having had the misfortune to suffer numerous contusions of a painful nature—he was still limping—when a faulty imprinted circuit caused his uniform to re-press itself while he was wearing it.

Dot listened and sympathized automatically, her (you might say) printed circuit of good manners in working order. But once she lost track of what he was saying, and he had to repeat himself.

"Drab Vern," she was thinking, "for all his purple and yellow hair, for all his gaudy livery."

She gave a slight start when he repeated his question, but he seemed not to see that. Quickly she got hold of herself and answered in a matter-of-fact way. But the thought and the feeling that went with the thought would not die away so quickly.

It was new to her to find fault with him and she felt a twinge and made up for it by nodding brightly to all he was saying—and once or twice she caught a strange look on his face.

How long could she hoodwink him? How long could she blindfold herself? Jukes Day was coming. In three weeks it would be here, dragging with it the unwilling visitors from the City; and her failure on the job—her betrayal of her trust—would come to light.

Vern seemed to be long in taking his leave. Oh, he was waiting for her to hand him her monthly report to the Board, which he often saved her the trouble of delivering.

Would the emerging of Bork have meaning for the Board? Something tempted her to doubt it, and in writing the report she had not gone out of her way to highlight the activity in the Juke Box. She had done little more than note the bare facts as a sop to her (you might say) printed circuit of conscience, but she had so swathed them in minutiae of temperature readings, births and deaths, force field fluctuations, and the like that they were all but shrouded.

She found herself looking at Vern in a new light—or rather in the shadow of Bork—and wondering how she could ever have borne him.

She handed him the report and he fluttered the sheaf at her as he entered his copter. There was a deep troubling in her at this moment. Her nerve seemed to be failing her.

There was still time to call him back and point up Bork's doings. But she returned Vern's wave and watched him disappear.

SHE WAKENED to every morning as if it were her first and last. She wakened looking forward to her clandestine meetings with Bork, sad trystings though they

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were. Though she and Bork were in touching distance they were out of touch itself.

If this be treason, she thought wryly . . .

One day he failed to appear and she waited a long while in vain, biting her lips until they bled. She returned to the tower and probed the Juke Box with the telescreen. She found no sign of him.

Likely he was down in his burrow. She hoped he wasn't ailing. But to have him ailing was better than to have to admit that Dzug might have done away with him or—what was even worse—that he was tiring of a courting that was getting him nowhere.

But Bork showed up the day following and she felt strong new stirrings as if her heart were a ship rocking at anchor.

Something new seemed to be stirring in him, too. She became aware the lambent eyes were fixing on her face in a way they never had before. She tried to make out the feeling underlying his look.

Was it loving? Was it pitying? She was unable to tell, but it seemed to her to be a longing look.

She smiled at him tenderly; his eyes fell for a moment and then fully met hers again, and he answered her smile.

But whatever he had been feeling had withdrawn from his eyes and he himself soon withdrew.

The morning after, she saw two figures coming toward her. They were moving at little more than a walk and it took some moments for her to realize one was hunting the other down.

The hunted one limped and the hunter, enjoying the hunt, held his own pace down and hefted his club as if paying out slack to a leash-straining hound.

The limping figure, the hunted one, was Bork. The hunter was a brute with a name that sounded something like Chixigg. Dot had let fall a warm rain not long before and the going was treacherous. Pieces of water lay scattered like a puzzle of the sky. Bork limped on. He kept looking back. Chixigg moved smoothly, not slopping the rain or its afterdip that pooled in the hollow marking the trepanning that had let out all the evil spirits his head once housed.

They rounded the Sties. The other Pawkerys were keeping out of the chase and out of sight. Only their heads bubbled up out of the burrows as if the mud were boiling. Bork and Chixigg passed the bluffs and the caves, threaded the groves, and neared the thicket, which seemed now a stand of javelins.

Dot knew she had to deliver Bork.

There was only one way to save him—cut off the force field

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and let him out, then switch it back on in Chixigg's face. She forgot the Board, she forgot herself, she forgot everything.

The controls were cold and hard to her touch.

Her ears rang with the screaming of crucified air as two weathers met and mingled.

The Juke Box area shimmered, settling almost imperceptibly into the cup of the force field. For a splith of a second a hairline of nothing showed, then crumbs of rock spilled into the space and wiped out the mark of the perimeter.

Opaqueness had gone with the field and Bork saw her waving him across. He moved warily, putting out his hand like one blind and feeling the air where the barrier had been.

She called impatiently. "Come on!"

Though Chixigg stood frozen, his mouth an "O" at the opening of vast new vistas, he would soon snap out of his freeze and spring after Bork, who was sniffing his way as if time did not matter. What possessed him? "Hurry!"

At last his hands convinced him his eyes weren't tricking him and he limped a lively limp as he iambed to her.

They stared at each other, somewhat unbelievingly. They were able to touch each other but neither reached out.

Chixigg's unfreezing unfroze Dot. She quickly turned to the controls to cut off his menacing approach.

A heavy and hurting hand struck hers away from the dials.

Drowning in pain, she saw Bork looming larger than life and wavery, as if through imperfect glass, and she thought crazily of uncorking him.

She stared at him in bewilderment. "Don't you understand?" She pointed to Chixigg. "He'll cross in a second unless I turn on the field." Her hands moved to the dials again.

Borks hands locked around her wrists. His fetid breath stifled her.

She grew angry. "Are you crazy? Do you *want* him to kill you?"

Coldness at her marrow. *Are you crazy?* It would be a wonder if he were *not* crazy. Her people had bred his people to *be crazy. She* had been crazy to think he was sane.

Still holding her, Bork grinned at Chixigg and called something to him.

CHIXIGG GRINNED at Bork. He threw back his head, flinging spray. He shouted—it was more call of partridge than call of human—and thumped his club on the earth ecstatically.

A legion of sounds answered and the caves and burrows spewed Pawkerys. Bludgeoning the air with clubs and carving it

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with knives and spears of sharpened bone, the Pawkerys swarmed out of what had been the Juke Box.

Leading the horde, six harnessed Pawkerys jolted King Dzug along in a spanking new four-wheeled chariot. His whip flicked their hides raw. He savaged the reins and the team slithered to a stop one yard in front of Bork and Dot. Dzug leaped from his chariot.

Bork knelt before him, forcing Dot to do the same.

Dzug waved them to their feet. He thrust his fingers among Dot's locks. He bent back her head and peered into her face. Lambent eyes like Borks lit a face chiseled out of some porous rock.

Dzug unsnarled his fingers abruptly, bringing tears to Dot's eyes. He turned to scan the horizon.

Bork spoke and Dzug shot another look at Dot and this time took in the control panel slung across her shoulder. Dzug barked and a male Pawkery raised his spear and aimed it at Dot.

Her heart stopped. But the Pawkery — automatically, the name Doey came up — only touched the tip of his spear to her throat with one hand and with the other gestured to her to keep her hands from the dials.

Bork unfettered her wrists, which she did not dare to rub, and without glancing at her moved to Dzug's side. He talked, punctuating his talking by pointing to the tower, the copter, and the City. Pawkerys—male and female, young and old—yokeled.

Dot heard a throbbing. Not her heart, though that was throbbing, too.

Vern!

The Pawkerys heard the throbbing and saw in the gilt-edging sun a glittering bird, small but growing.

Bork cried a warning.

The Pawkerys ran into each other in their rush to take cover in the thicket. Some made for the tower and others, instinctively trusting to their natural camouflaging of spattered mud, flung themselves into ditches and lay prone.

Doey grabbed Dot with a sweating paw and dragged her into the brush. They crouched behind hawthorn saplings. The spear pricking her back told her not to call out.

If Vern failed to see that the dark stripe of the otherwise transparent Juke Box had vanished he would not know all had vanished. He would not know the Pawkerys were loose.

Dot prayed he would use his eyes and his brains and head back to the City for help.

The bird swooped down. But it didn't land. It came to roost on nothing. It hung motionless for a moment and hope surged

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through Dot.

It landed. Vern stepped out.

Dot bit her lips. It took a minute for her to sense that the tip of the spear was not touching her back. She slowly moved her head and cornered her eyes.

Doey, gaping at what the bird had laid, was forgetting to guard her and had ordered arms.

She got set. It took Doey by surprise when she made the dash. She broke through the javelin wood, her spinal cord writhing, recoiling from the spear that would nail it down.

Vern had paused momentarily to wonder mildly at the abandoned chariot. He was nearing the tower when Dot came panting up to him.

Hurriedly he s m o o t h e d, draped, lifted, flared. He blushed at her heaving breast.

"Oh, good morrow, Citizen Sarx."

She recovered her breath.

"We have to take off. Hurry!"

He lifted higher, flared wider.

"Leave your post? You're joking."

She knew she was looking wild.

"Turn back, Vern! Get help! The Pawkerys are loose!"

"Oh?" The joke was in poor taste.

She wanted to beat understanding into him. The thicket was moving. She remembered her controls. There might be time to seal in most of the horde.

Too late. The horde was upon them. They were Pawkeried about.

VERN WAS calm.

"How did they get loose? Power shorted somehow, I suppose, hum?"

The Pawkerys stared at Vern in marveling silence. Dot and Vern stood in a halo of clear space, the Pawkerys around them like microbes around mold growth.

Vern might be able to burst through, Dot thought.

She whispered tensely, "Run!"

Vern smiled at her.

"Now, now, my dear. Leave them to me."

She was sick with fear. All the males of her people were Verns. If he failed, all who followed him in trying to deal with the Pawkerys would fail.

Vern folded his arms and gazed at them kindly. It was touching. The poor brutes were free and didn't know what to do with their freedom. Likely they thought they were lost and were afraid with the newborn's fear on being thrust from the warm womb.

It was touching, but he couldn't help wanting to move away from their overpowering stink.

But the poor troglodytes were so clearly out of their element he

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made up his mind to herd them back as gently as he could—though he did want to get this over with as quickly as he could and get back to telling Dot the really exciting news about the race.

They were muttering now and he raised a hand to still them.

"Back, back."

Gently but firmly. No need to frighten the poor beasts further.

"Go back, go back."

The muttering swelled. Chixigg moved nearer. Vern brought his down-staring gaze to bear on this impudent creature. A shade more firmness.

"Back, back."

He frowned. Why weren't they backing? He unfrowned. He had to smile at himself. Of course! The words would mean nothing to them. He skyed his eyes. Unreasoning brutes!

He brushed the air with the back of his hand to show them.

The circle closed in.

The worm at his temple came to life. He didn't know where to look. They were all around him. Their unblinking eyes—not at all like the friendly winking lights of DIANE or DORIS—impaled him.

Chixigg reached out to Vern and felt the dazzling silk of his cloak.

Vern humored him, though he winced to think of the markings those impertinent paws would leave.

The silk tore. Vern pulled away, angrily, to a longer scream of ripping, but Chixigg still held to him daintily by the strip, like a bridesmaid carrying a train.

The catenary straightened, tautened, as if the brute were reeling him in. The one with the tall cone on his head grunted something and the tone of the answering grunts lifted Vern's scalp.

He remembered the rabbit.

His eyes rolled wildly, trying to escape taking in that ill-bred mass. He suddenly broke loose from the one with the top of his head sucked in. He ducked through the circle and darted toward his copter. But Pawkerys, their pupils live coals, blocked the way. He turned and darted into the tower and across the ground floor, bolting for the rear door. Once through the door, he could reach his copter from behind.

The door wouldn't give.

He screeched. "Let me out!" His nails scraped at the bronze. He was a corpse scratching at its coffin lid.

WHEN DOT came to she found Bork squatting at her side. He had unslung the control panel and was trying to make out how it worked. Chixigg entered the tower and twisted up out of sight. Soon she heard and saw the many-colored glass of the dome

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shatter. Other Pawkerys stole upon the copters, ready to dodge if the big birds stirred, and crippled them. A boy came running with a fluttering torch of fennel and fired them. The ghosts of their guts went up in greasy dove-gray columns. The main body of Pawkerys started to swarm toward the City. Dzug's team yoked itself and stood champing.

Dzug hovered, smiling down at Bork. Without altering his smile he plucked a spear from the hand of one of his retinue. One who had stolen the lightning (that there was such a thing was somehow in his memory) of the gods could steal the thunder of Dzug. Now that Dzug's realm was boundless his grip had to be all the tighter. Still smiling he gripped the spear tighter and thrust.

Dot never knew whether it was her scream or the shadow of the spear that warned Bork.

Bork slid away from the point. It grazed him and, whetted with the taste of blood, sought him again.

Bork catted to all fours but Dzug pressed on and gave him no pause. The thirsting spear drank again, but not its fill. Fear took hold of Bork and dark shadows floated before his eyes.

He rose and ran. One of Dzug's retinue stuck out a foot and Bork stumbled but kept going. He was in the clear now and heading for the Juke Box area, hoping to lose himself in the burrows. And now, when he was really running for his life, he made surprising time.

Clouds impinged on Dot's consciousness. No eyes were on her as she crept to the control panel. All eyes were enjoying the spectacle of King Dzug desperately holding to the spear as it lapped after Bork. She twirled dials imploringly.

The sky turned to clay. An instant's growth of lightning took root. Windfall of thunder stoned them all.

Veiling her eyes against the hail, Dot passed a cowering Dzug. As soon as she felt she was treading Pawkery midden she tensed out the force field around the Juke Box.

Immediately there was the silence and stillness of another weather.

She had been prepared to abandon all hope, but when she looked around at the trembling apart of saplings she saw Bork.

He emerged from the thicket. His face was white where hail or sweat had plowed it. His legs gave under him and he sat in a bowed mass, not moving his head when she tore her underclothing and bandaged his ribs.

OUTSIDE the Juke Box the storm had spent itself. In vain Dzug had shivered his spear on

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the invisible shield and had ridden after his horde.

Dot had not restored the opaqueness. When she looked toward the City that night she saw a pyre.

The next morning she saw the tower, its dome a gouged Argus, a web of empty leading, and wondered dully if the Board, too, lay in shatters.

Away out over the plain and streaming from the City she saw toward noon something like a crowd of people. At first she wasn't sure who they were, but after they had come a little nearer, although they were still some way off, she saw they were at least not naked Pawkerys, and her heart leaped.

A hushed and ashen hope that her people had risen from the flames took wing in her breast. Meanwhile they had moved nearer and the more she stared the less she could hold back tears of joy.

She could tell by the silks that making up the crowd were Touts (poor Vern!) and Bingoists and Pollsters and all the rest and her heart made holiday.

They moved unsteadily—it must have been a wearing mix-up—but they moved on. And now they had come almost to the edge of the Juke Box and she could see clearly who they were.

They had the Pawkery face.

With benumbing crystallinity she watched the wedge of King Dzug's chariot split the crowd. His Imperial Majesty, swaddled in a bloody stole, stepped down and toddled regally back and forth on high heels.

Bork stood looking out, a Moses on Pisgah, forlornly gazing on the promised land.

Dot began to laugh and couldn't stop, not even when Bork glared at her. It had suddenly struck her—this was Jukes Day.

When she at last choked off her laughing she was verging on tears. She turned from the Pawkerys parading their finery and looked inward.

Beyond the thicket, sunlight lent the stream a warm pulsing. All was not lost. At least she had Bork to herself.

Not quite.

She heard a moaning and saw a figure crawling toward them.

It was the starveling Lida. From the crest of midden she stared at the cavorting Pawkerys. There came over her the lost look of a child shut out of a magic mountain. She spilled and clawed to the edge of the force field. She pressed her bony form against the implacable wall and whimpered. The hair falling over her face muffled the sound and the wall seemed to give back a peering echo. The vapor of her panicky breathing fogged out on adamant nothing and curtained

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mocking faces.

First sight of Lida lit a fuze in Dot but the fire raging along her veins fizzled out. Her eyes softened. It wasn't as if she would have to share Bork with this pitiful creature.

They would simply have to put up with one another. She smiled gravely. It would be no easy job. They could never be on the same footing. But she would be kind to the poor thing.

She hoped there were no other lost souls lurking in the Juke Box.

DOT'S MANNERS cost her first pick at Bork's leavings. Lida's flesh no longer gleamed waxily and her eyes no longer gazed out of valleys of shadow. Lida was taking a hog's share and Dot had to begin to consider herself.

Her belly at last made up her mind and she was fighting for the scraps Bork tossed aside. She and Lida were evenly matched and it soon became politic to share and share alike, though they still glared at each other as they gnawed.

Other things changed.

One day there was no Dzug.

Chixigg passed by, cutting a dash in the bloodied dunce cap.

The Pawkerys at first hung about the Juke Box and pointed in at whichever of the prisoners they spotted, and purpled laughing. But as time went on more and more of them drifted away across the landscape as if seeking a way out of the horizon.

And each one of the few who stayed anywhere near the Juke Box no longer came to make sport but turned his head away from it as if he didn't want it to remind him of something he had shut away in his skull.

And so, although the Juke Box might in time become a lost Eden, it was now a place taboo.

Bork's eyes had lost their fire and he grew heavy and slept much. He never tinkered nowadays. He lorded a world where game abounded, filling his traps faster than he was able to empty them; where grain and fruit had rich communion with the wind; where the largest cave was his and two females did his bidding.

DOT WIPED grease from her mouth and jaw with the back of her hand and looked across the fire at Lida.

Lida, sunk in her own thoughts, was licking her fingers.

Dot gazed at the lonely flickering figure and thought, *why must we hate each other?* It might pay to make friends with the girl. She could afford to be gracious to Lida. She could hold her own against Lida when it came to clawing, so it wouldn't seem a sign of weakness if she made the first move.

Her body, at least the part of

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it she turned to the fire, was warm but her soul was shivering. She felt the need of warmth and understanding. True, she had Bork to herself. He hadn't given Lida a glance since she crawled into sight and his only intercourse with her was his grunting at her to bring water or wood—and this was another reason why Dot could afford to be gracious.

But he was hardly the most charming of lovers.

Maybe she would find the missing tenderness if she got at the sister-feeling in Lida. She rose and circled the fire.

Lida watched her with eyes that showed suspicion. Dot smiled down. Lida looked sullenly. The pouched eyes took in Dot's flowing, though shredding and blackening, clothing resentfully.

Dot had picked up a few words.

"Greufir!"

Lida stared blankly at Dot.

Dot turned down her mouth, then recovered her smile.

"Gur!"

Lida's stare hardened.

Dot gave it one last try, gamely.

"Zutmak!"

A look of distaste passed across Lida's face and she turned her back to Dot.

Feeling beaten, and angry at having demeaned herself in vain, Dot returned to her place. She had failed to get through to Lida.

She was wrong.

Dot's move had stilled whatever qualms Lida had about challenging Dot's status and had sparked Lida to make a move of her own.

When Bork came into the cave, belching, Lida greeted him as softly as the tongue allowed.

Bork looked at her in surprise and grunted back. He seemed to be seeing her for the first time.

That night Bork and Lida drew off into the depths of the cave.

Dot lay curled up with her back to the fire, watching the dumb show of shadows on the wall of the cave searchingly. Leaving mind and manners out of it, how could he favor that—that pale bloated grub over Dot?

The following morning Lida answered Dot's gaze by opening her grinning gap in an arch of triumph. But as it turned out, that night Bork favored neither over the other. And the morning following that, Lida's mouth seemed more the opening of a tomb, and when Dot emerged from the depths of the cave Lida gave her a vicious pinch as they passed.

All right, Dot thought. She would wait her chance and turn off the field when no one but Lida was at its edge, let her cross (rather, lean on nothing and fall across), then turn it on.

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She lived on hope of that chance.

SHE CRIED OUT in her sleep and wakened.

A heavy shadow was moving across her face. She lifted an eyelid and cringed within her housing of flesh.

Her shadow skin sloughing as she leaned into light, Lida, damp as the oozing walls of the cave, was looming. A stone, a boulder almost, poised in her uplifting hands.

People in glass houses, Dot thought hysterically.

She slued her body as Lida dashed the stone at her. Slivers of lightning split into darkness.

The dark shroud lifted. The rock had merely grazed her temple. But it pained and wet warmth stuck to her fingers when she touched them to it.

She sat up quickly and there was a tutti-frutti flashing behind her eyes. The fire was burning low but she could see Lida had fled. She sank back with a sigh.

She felt for the panel, the key. Her fingers crawled the floor of the cave. In panic she sat up quickly again, and again a mosaic of pain lit her brain.

She looked around for the control panel. She was too dazed to see it at once but if it had been a snake it would have bitten her —if it hadn't been a snake that was all entrails.

The rock had missed crushing her skull but it had caved the shell of the panel and extruded a mess of molybdenum electrodes.

She crept to the mouth of the cave and thrust out like a tongue. She gazed up at the moon and the stars—which one was Iota Ursae Majoris?—and wondered if the Juke Box had lost its covering.

She rose tremblingly but gathered strength as she went. She descended the bluff. Her body all one pulse, she darted along the stream, the moon and stars pacing her above and below. Hardly marking her way, she bore on, her face stony but wet.

She reached the midden and saw she needed to go no farther.

In bowed silhouette against the sky Lida was beating her fists against nothing.

Dot returned to the cave, moving slowly to think. There was still hope. Maybe someday, Bork would regain the spark and calculate *pi* or *radius* or whatever it was—she wished she had really learned math—and find the center of the Juke Box and sink a shaft to the buried force field projector and worry out of it the way it worked and deliver them. She believed it because it was absurd. By that time the Pawkerys would welcome—would have to if they didn't want to—their legendary fire-bringer. Anyway, pending those happenings,

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the Juke Box would protect as well as imprison.

And meanwhile she would have to watch out for Lida, sleep with one eye open.

She wakened from the sea with a start. A heavy shadow was falling across her again. She cringed and looked around.

It was Bork entering the cave. He flung a brace of rabbits to the floor. His glance slipped past Dot and fell on the smashed controls.

What she saw of his face—the down had turned into barbed tangle—clenched like a fist. He bent over her and pulled her to her feet by an arm.

He stropped his hand on her cheeks. She grunted in pain. Her knees gave and she sank to them.

"No, no! Lida did it! Lida did it!"

But he was beyond hearing her voice and much farther beyond understanding her words even if blood had not clotted them.

THE KEY (you might say) had snapped off in the lock and in the snapping had jammed the wards. In fine, the smashing the controls had taken had knocked the weather down a notch or two. It was always cold when the sun slid away.

There was an aching under her left collarbone. If only she had the use of the hypos. That would have been one way out of the Juke Box. At first she had thought of finding another way out, and her eyes kept following the fall of the bluff almost sheer to the stream.

She was coming to accept, if not to welcome, pain. It was only fair that she should atone in some measure for her great guilt. And yet it was something more that made her friends with pain.

Joy-sorrow, good-evil, black-white—on the negative pole's charge depended the potential of the positive pole. And watching the careless way Lida went up and down the crumbling path in the face of the bluff, Dot stored energy for the time of hope's fulfilling.

The streaming of time wore the pebble days smooth, and one evening as she lay by the fire her memory picked up and handed over a pebble. She turned it around and wondered which had won the race—DIANE or DORIS. She dropped it quickly.

Lida stood over her.

Dot narrowed her eyes and gunned her reactions. But Lida, as if she had never borne Dot any ill will, much less tried to kill her, was gazing at her trustingly.

Lida spoke. A strange stirring in her belly frightened her.

Dot rose and stared at Lida coldly. Did the girl really expect sympathy or help?

Lida shifted her feet nervously, the trusting look beginning to

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melt into a mask of tragedy.

Dot grimaced. She sighed and told Lida to stand still.

She examined the girl. Lida stood tense. Dot finished. She asked Lida a question and nodded when she heard the answer. She gazed at Lida strangely. Lida stood tenser. Dot told her she was heavy with life.

In the next few moments Lida veered back and forth between being overbearing, as one carrying Bork's first child, and being fawning, as one who would be needing midwifing.

For a while Dot could stop staring at each shadow to see if it lived. She breathed deeply the stale air of the cave. Surcease. For a while the shadows would not hold shudders.

Still, her eyes followed the fall of the bluff and she felt vaguely cheated.

The setting sun broke through clouds. It lent the stream a warm pulsing that reflected back on Dot.

Rubbing a painful swelling of her left lid, she remembered the way things were in her childhood, the way the Board had run the City Crèche.

She gestured suddenly as if flinging away a handful of pebbles. She would start from scratch. She began making hopeful plans. There were many things to think of and many things to do—delivering a woman of child and helping to raise the child were no light matters.

First she had to warn Lida about going up and down the path.

∞ ∞ ∞

PREDICTION: Richard Wilson, Edward Wellen, Randall Garrett, Isaac Asimov, Damon Knight, David Mason, Harlan Ellison, and Robert Silverberg are, we think you'll agree, a genuine all-star cast of writers—the best of the new- and old-timers in science fiction. You've met them all in this issue of INFINITY, and you'll be able to meet them all *in person* at the 14th World Science-Fiction Convention, to be held at the Hotel Biltmore, New York City, over the Labor Day weekend. Oh yes, the editor of INFINITY will be there too, along with dozens of other editors, writers, illustrators, and readers. To make sure you get all the news about this gala annual affair, send your $2.00 registration fee now to the World Science-Fiction Convention Society, P. O. Box 272, Radio City Station, New York 19, N. Y.

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the FOOL

by DAVID MASON

Illustrated by WESTON

The Tarchiki were the universe's worst pupils—

and as a teacher, Duncan was a first-rate carpenter!

DUNCAN? No, he wasn't the Agent just before you. He was here in 2180—oh, a good thirty years back, Earth-time. The natives say hundreds of years, but they're a short-lived lot. The way they cut each other's throats, it's a wonder any of them live out the life span they've got, anyway.

I came out when Duncan did —knew him pretty well, as well as anybody could. A perfect fool. Knowing him was a real education. Do anything the other way from the way Duncan did it, and you'd be all right.

You wouldn't think it to look at him. Well set-up man, around thirty when he got here, intelligent face, good talker, had a degree—but a fool. Seemed as if he couldn't do anything right. He told me once that he'd been married, and that it had broken up. He more or less implied that his wife had gotten sick of little things—broken dishes, tactless

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remarks, carelessness. You wouldn't think that would be enough to break up a marriage, but you've got no idea how that sort of thing can add up.

I was clerking for him then. I swear I did all the work. I had to. He couldn't add, couldn't file a record, and couldn't have found one if he'd managed somehow to put it away. I took Agent's inventories, I did most of the trading with the native chiefs, I did everything. Duncan just bumbled around the post, or listened to records, or wrote those silly, hopeless, letters to his ex-wife. He was trying to get her to come back to him. How do I know? Well, who do you think worked the subspace transmitter, as well as doing everything else?

The native thing really annoyed me, though, because it was dangerous. You know the Tarchiki. They look human enough, except for minor details. When it comes to a Tarchik female I'll overlook the green skin and the pointed ears every time. But they aren't entirely like us. They have a liking for war and torture that's really sickening.

Our ancestors? Oh, now, really . . . you're talking just like Duncan. That was always his apology for them. He said our own ancestors were pretty bad, too. Certainly they were, but I can't see any ancestor of mine acting the way a Tarchik does with a captured enemy. And they haven't the slightest sense of sportsmanship, either. They'd rather jump you from ambush than fight in the open, and they won't fight at all if the enemy's stronger than they are. That's why they've never made any serious attempt to do in all the Earthmen on their world. That, and greed; they get very good deals from us, and they know it.

Anyway, I'm sure none of my ancestors ever acted like that.

BUT DUNCAN was always ready to forgive a Tarchik anything. That used to upset the hell out of them, too, because they expect to be punished when they're caught at anything. They don't understand our reluctance to kill, but they respect a Patrolman's shock gun, and when they get caught stealing or taking each other's tails they know they're going to get a few months in quod, or what they hate much worse, a public flogging. If they didn't get punished, they'd assume it was weakness on our part. Just like kids.

Anyway, there was Duncan, holding long confabs with the Tarchiki, trying to teach them some sort of elementary ethics. Naturally, it didn't take at all. They listened, because they love long speeches, but they never acted on what he said.

He used to tell them that if

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they stopped chopping each other up and hanging up the rows of tails as war trophies, their lives would be a lot pleasanter. They used to nod and applaud, but Duncan never caught on to the simple fact that they thought this was meant to be a joke. *They* didn't think their lives weren't pleasant enough. After all, look at their situation. They've got plenty to eat, without working hard for it, plenty of time on their hands—why shouldn't they keep down their surplus population? They don't know any other way, except breaking up their eggs, and they only do that to enemy tribes.

While he was at it, Duncan tried to tell them all about love and things like that. Oh, no, not sex. If there's anything a Tarchik doesn't know about *that,* there's no Earthman going to teach him. I mean the way they treat their women. A Tarchik woman's nothing but a piece of property as far as sex goes, but there's some kind of curious maternal inheritance thing—anyway, it's as funny as hell to see a big Tarchik buck get down and bump his head in front of his mother, and his aunts, and all his other female ancestors. That's the one thing he's really afraid of. But, till she gets to be a mother, a woman leads a fairly rough life, getting passed around as a kind of prize of war, working harder than the men, all that.

So Duncan wanted them to be a bit chivalrous to their women. Share the work, all kinds of things like that. You know what they thought of that idea—another Earthman's joke.

But the funniest thing of all, to them, was his idea about the kids. Naturally, a Tarchik pup's no use to its father till it's a bit grown. Then, if it's a boy, the old man teaches it to drink *smassi* and file its teeth, and go out ambushing and cutting tails with the other noble savages. If it's a girl, the father looks around for a suitable buyer as soon as its breasts are grown, and hopes for the best price possible.

To the mothers, though, the kids represent a kind of investment, since custom directs the first loyalties to the mother's clan. So they treat them pretty well, although a bit casually, since they litter by twos and at least once a year.

Anyway, Duncan seemed to think highly of kids. Can't imagine why, since he never had any of his own. He used to run a kind of school for them. Taught them all kinds of things a Tarchik's got no use for at all, made toys for them—badly, naturally; he couldn't have cut his initials in a tree without slicing his thumb. But what he couldn't make in the way of school stuff, he imported from Earth. Cost him his entire

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salary, except for what he spent on those futile letters to his wife.

Those kids were fond of him, I suppose—as fond of him as a Tarchik ever gets of anything. They even kept the school foolishness going awhile afterward, but I think it's gone now.

Anything that fool Duncan said, the Tarchiki thought was a great joke. They wouldn't have hurt his feelings for anything, for fear he'd quit telling them tall stories. They told him quite a few things, too. He wrote it all down, in dead earnest, as if their fairy tales and drum poems had any value. I sent the whole lot off to his wife, after it happened. I think it got lost in transit—I never heard from her, anyway. Or she may have thrown it all away. I can't imagine what else you could do with such a pile of nonsense.

As a matter of fact, that's what led up to it—those damned legends. Duncan got interested in their religion. Never do that, boy. Let 'em all have their ghost stories and wooden gods, and never fool around with their idea of what makes the planet go round.

The Tarchiks have a lot of small time fetishes, but they also have one big god, a fat one made out of stone, out in the jungle over near Mount Clarke. Every so often they all go up in a body and pay him a visit, and they take along any spare pups, usually extra girl children or prisoners from other tribes. This god—Kachan, his name is, I think—likes children too. He likes them best roasted, like birds on a spit. Charming deity.

Anyway, when Duncan found out about Kachan, he got very upset. He went blazing out there to Mount Clarke, and he blew Kachan all to bits with a grenade. The Tarchiki didn't care for that, naturally.

About a week later, Duncan was on his way over to the big village near here, to give his Tarchik kids another arithmetic lesson, I suppose. Old Stancha—he was the local religious big shot, a kind of High Priest—threw a spear from the bushes, Tarchik fashion, and nailed Duncan very neatly. Nailed, yes. That's the way we found him, with his back against a tree.

Just another case of a man's foolishness catching up with him. But Duncan hasn't stopped giving us trouble yet, dead or not. First thing that happened was that old Stancha came in to the post, demanding to be executed. He claimed he'd made a big mistake killing Duncan, the biggest mistake of his life. I never could figure out what he meant—it seemed to have something to do with what Duncan said to him just before he died.

Well, if Stancha had kept his mouth shut, we'd have had no

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case at all, which would have been just fine with me. I was Agent, in Duncan's place, and I was out to see to it that business stayed good and got better. Can't annoy the natives by executing their high priest and expect good trade. But I couldn't very well let Stancha go, either, once he'd confessed. So I had him tried, all proper and correct, and executed him in due form.

Next thing I knew, the Tarchiks were putting Kachan back together again. They were all up there, building a great big new version, and having a first class party at the same time. These parties generally lead to a tail-hunting expedition, so I expected some trouble. But it didn't, this time.

There was plenty of noise, though. The Tarchiki never do anything quietly, and this seemed to be an occasion. What with drums, bagpipes, wailing and howling, there wasn't a bird would roost for twenty miles around.

When they got all through, I went up to look over the new statue, out of curiosity, and because I'd heard that they hadn't sacrificed a single pup. I thought there must be something queer about Kachan Number Two. There was.

It was Duncan. They'd given him a tail, and he looked more like a Tarchik than an Earthman, but the face was unmistakable. They aren't half bad carvers, you know; and they'd really spread themselves this time. The thing was forty feet tall, and it stood on a rock platform, with some words carved in that lettering Duncan had taught them to use. The words were something Duncan was supposed to have said as he was dying.

I never could read that stuff really well; all I got out of the thing was that Duncan was forgiving the old murderer, because he didn't know what he was doing. Pure nonsense, of course, but you don't expect a dying man to make sense, and particularly not Duncan. But it seems those words were what had caused all the to-do.

I found the story in one of those ballads Duncan had collected. Seems that the Tarchiki had been expecting a great teacher to show up, who'd do all sorts of wonderful things for them. Nothing unusual; all primitives have some story like that. But there was something else.

The idea was that if the Tarchiki listened to this teacher, he'd make them the most important people in the whole world; in the universe, in fact, from the way the thing sounded. Just how, wasn't specified. But if they should let him be killed, they would know who he had been

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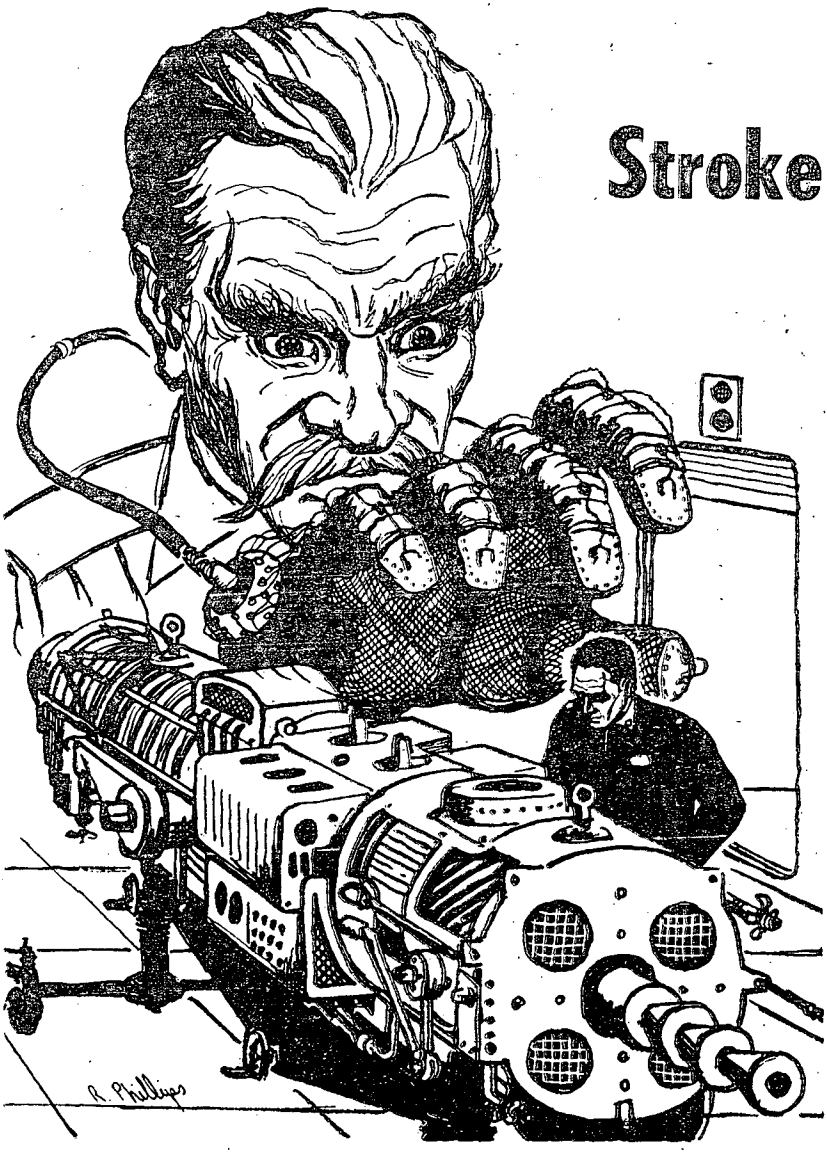
Stroke



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# of Genius

by RANDALL GARRETT

Crayley plotted a murder that was scientific in both motive and method—and as perfect as the mask of his face!

Illustrated by PHILLIPS

CRAYLEY stood thoughtfully before the huge screen and watched the fingers move.

Metal fingers, five on each hand; each hand attached to an arm, and each pair of arms connected to a silvery sphere that sat atop a four-foot pillar. Within the pillar, micro-relays ticked and chuckled, sending delicately measured surges of power here and there through silver nerves to metal muscles. Responding, the hands built an energy generator. And when they finished, they built another. And another. On and on, monotonously.

Crayley rubbed absently at his mustache and plotted murder.

"— be a great deal cheaper, Mr. Crayley?"

Crayley realized he hadn't been listening to what the man beside him was saying. He turned his head to look at the Space Force officer and said quietly,

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"I'm sorry, major; I didn't quite get you."

"I said that it seems to me that ordinary production machinery would be a great deal cheaper. Why do they use those waldoes?"

Crayley smiled faintly. "Why do you use waldoes to repair a generator on a ship?"

The major looked at Crayley to see if he was kidding, then said, "A man can't live five seconds near an unshielded generator, and you have to take the shielding off to get at the innards. But I don't see how that applies. Each repair job is different. I'll admit that I'm not a drive engineer—I wouldn't know the first thing about repairing one—but I do know that the engineer has to use remote control hands because the work is so delicate.

"But this—" He waved a hand at the screen. "— is recorded. It's routine. Why spend all the money on those tape-controlled robots when much simpler machines can be made to do the job?"

I wonder, Crayley thought to himself, *if this blockhead knows which end of his ship to point up when he's taking off?* "Two reasons, Major. In the first place, building a sub-nucleonic converter is also a delicate job—as delicate as repairing it. In the second place, we have something here that will save money in the long run. Do you know what retooling would cost in this business if we used ordinary bit-by-bit production line methods?"

The major spread his hands. "I have no idea."

"Millions. Every day, some physicist comes up with a new idea on sub-nucleonics. Within a week or so, enough of these ideas have snowballed to produce a slight modification that will improve a spacedrive—increase its speed, improve its efficiency, and so on. Within six or eight months, enough improvements have built up to make it worthwhile to incorporate them into the drive we're building. If North American used production line robots, we'd have to rip out the whole bunch and rebuild 'em to make the new generator. Why? Because the ordinary robotic device is a specialist; it can, at most, do two or three things—usually only one. And if you eliminate the thing that a particular robot does, or change it a little, you have to rebuild the tools and re-arrange them before reprogramming the whole line.

"The waldo, a working replica of the human arm and hand, isn't specialized like that; it's adaptable; it can do anything. If we have to modify the design, all we have to do is reprogram the tapes, which is a comparatively easy job.

"And besides, if anything goes wrong down there, we can put the hands on manual and go trouble-shooting, something we

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THE WALDOES *described in this story actually exist now. They are used in atomic installations for remote handling of radioactive materials, and they are actually called "waldoes." Which proves again that science fiction can make accurate predictions, because they were described in considerable detail, before being invented, by Robert A. Heinlein, in a story called—"Waldo"!*

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couldn't do with production line stuff."

"I see," the major said, nodding. "Ingenious." He glanced at his wrist. "Do you suppose Mr. Klythe is through yet?"

The smile that touched Crayley's mind did not reach his face. "I think he's just about through." His voice was completely innocent of any subtle innuendoes.

HE GLANCED again at the screen that pictured the hundreds of hands moving automatically through their intricate motions in the production tunnel deep underground, then touched a switch. As the screen faded to blankness, he turned and led the way down the corridor to Klythe's office.

Crayley paced his steps neatly so that he would stay just a foot in the lead. A foot, no more. Too much would be obvious. A foot was quite enough to show who was leading.

His lean face was, as always, set in a placid mask. A thousand years before, Lewis Crayley might have worn a helmet of steel to hide his thoughts. Two hundred years before, he might have worn eyeglasses. Now, since there was no excuse to wear either, Crayley could only hide behind his own face.

It was a face well constructed for the purpose. The nose was large and prominent—plenty of room to hide behind a nose like that. The brows were craggy and shaggy, overshadowing the half-closed eyes beneath them. The heavy mustache, which he wore in spite of the fact that it was looked upon as an anachronism, effectively concealed any expression the thin, firm mouth might show.

His hands, too, were useful. Their quick, nervous movements distracted attention from the face when they were away from it, and effectively concealed it when they were nervously rubbing his nose or stroking his mustache.

Using only God-given materials, Lewis Crayley had built a magnificently efficient wall between himself and the world. He could see out, but no one could see in.

Not that Crayley thought of it that way. Crayley was just calm, that was all. He had control over his emotions; he didn't let them

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run away with him. Poise and impartial objectivity were his. He allowed nothing to bother him, and no one to thwart him.

Berin Klythe was attempting to do just that. There was, Crayley admitted, nothing malicious about it. Klythe was not trying to suppress Crayley; there was just nothing else he could do. There is nothing malicious about an asteroid, either, but when one lies directly athwart the orbit of a spaceship, either the ship must veer aside or the asteroid blasted out of the way. And Crayley was not the type to change his orbit.

There was no malice or hatred on Crayley's part, either. One does not hate an asteroid.

He pushed open the door to Klythe's outer office and allowed the Space Force major to follow him in. The girl behind the desk was sliding her fingers expertly over the sparkling panel of a photowriter, and her pace didn't change as she looked up.

"Yes, Mr. Crayley?"

"Is Mr. Klythe through yet?"

Her hand touched another panel. "Mr. Crayley is here with the gentleman from the Space Force." She listened for a moment to a sonobeam the men couldn't hear, then she nodded. "Go right in."

Berin Klythe was coming out from behind his desk when they stepped into the inner office. His smile was broad and his hand outstretched. Crayley snapped his voice into action.

"Berin, this is Major Stratford. Major — Mr. Klythe, our Director."

Klythe was pumping the major's hand. "Sorry to have kept you waiting, Major. Just one of those things that has to be cleared up to keep things moving."

"Perfectly all right. I was a little bit early, and Mr. Crayley was good enough to show me around."

Crayley rubbed his mustache and waited for the greetings to get themselves over with. The major was trying to act nonchalant, but it was easy to see that he was somewhat in awe of Klythe. Klythe had taken the Big Gamble and won, and not very many people had done that. In the first place, the government only picked a few of the very best men to go through Rejuvenation. Men who were necessary, brilliant, useful. Men like Berin Klythe, who was important and a genius.

That was a point that Crayley admitted. Klythe was a genius. And, very likely, a more capable one than Crayley. But Crayley, too, was a genius in his own way, and he didn't feel that mere brilliancy should allow Klythe to block his path.

Three years ago, Berin Klythe had been a graying, stocky, aging man of sixty. Now he was lithe,

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dark of hair, clear of eye, and full of the energy of a twenty-five year old body.

He'd be good for another century. And Lewis Crayley wouldn't.

"SIT DOWN, Major," Berin was saying. "Commander Edder told me you'd be around, but he only hinted at the trouble."

"Is this room sealed, Mr. Klythe?" the major asked calmly.

Klythe reached across his desk and touched a panel. "It is now."

The major nodded. "We don't want any of this to leak out; it might cause panic." He paused for a moment. "You're a Sirian by birth, aren't you, Mr. Klythe?"

Klythe nodded. "My grandparents were among the first colonists on New Brooklyn."

"Then you probably know first hand how tough it is to tame an extra-solar planet, no matter how closely it approaches Earth-type."

Klythe nodded, narrowing his eyes.

"So when a colony disappears, we don't think anything of it—" Stratford stopped, frowning. "No, I don't mean that. What I mean is, we usually attribute it to another loss in our fight against the natural forces of the planet. The colony's gone; you blame disease, the flora, the fauna, the storms, everything else. Then you try to re-establish the colony.

"But lately things have been happening in a certain sector. I'm not at liberty to say where, nor what happened. Whole colonies were gone when the five-year check came. The pattern was only in one area, but we're pretty sure of what's happening. Something out there, something intelligent in its own way, is erasing those colonies. Our analysts suspect that whoever or whatever is doing it doesn't know we're intelligent. What it boils down to is this: we have an interstellar war on our hands."

Klythe nodded slowly after a moment. "I get it. That's why you asked for this funny modification of the drive generator—the new J-233. It isn't supposed to be a drive generator at all."

"That's right," said Major Stratford, "it's a weapon."

"Why tell us now?" Crayley asked softly. "I mean, you've ordered the thing; we've practically got it ready. Why not leave us in the dark?"

"We don't want you to build it now. We've got a better one—much better. But it calls for a gadget that you'd immediately know was not a driver. We decided to tell you rather than have you asking embarrassing questions.

"And we have neither the facilities nor the capacity to build it ourselves."

Crayley said slowly, "You mean the J-233 is obsolete? We

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scrap it without ever putting it in production?"

"That's right," said the major. He grinned. "You were just telling me how adaptable your production machinery is to—ah—retooling, I think you called it. I was glad to hear it."

Damn! Crayley thought. *Damdamdamdamdamn!*

His mind whirled for a moment, hopping frantically from one point to another. Then he forced it to be calm. Everything wasn't lost—just delayed.

"—in the strictest confidence," the major was saying. "Nothing must leak out. We don't want to throw a scare into the world population just now."

Klythe looked as though he had a good case of goosebumps himself.

Crayley felt nothing. He said, "How soon can you get the original down here?"

The major spread his hands. "I'm not prepared to say. You'll have to take that up with our technicians. Out of my field, you understand.

"I am also to ask you how soon you can get this into production. We'll need five thousand units."

Klythe looked thoughtful. "It'll depend on the breakdown, of course; these things take time. Five thousand units. Hmmmm. Assuming increasing complexity—figure twice the time for a regular model and extra time for analysis—mmmm." He appeared to be figuring deeply.

Five days, thought Crayley contemptuously.

"It'll take all of a week to set up for it," Klythe said. "If we get three tunnels running, you can have your five thousand units in—say twelve weeks."

"Fine," said Stratford. "I am also informed that our own technicians will be on hand for the recording. I have no idea what that may mean, but—"

"I see. Very well, tell them we'll expect them to be here with the original!" Klythe said sharply.

THE MAJOR raised his eyebrows at Klythe's voice. "Is there something wrong, Mr. Klythe?"

"There is," Klythe said blandly. "But I'm not blaming you, of course. A question of the specialty."

"I see," said the major. One did not question another's work too closely. Get nosy with other people, and they get nosy with you.

"It's rather as though I hired you to take a cargo to Sirius for me and then insisted that you use my crew instead of your own," Klythe explained. "Perhaps the parallel isn't too good—I know nothing of interstellar commerce—but that may get the idea across."

"I sympathize," said Stratford.

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"If there's anything I can do—?"

"Nothing," said Klythe, smiling. "It isn't fatal. Now—" He rubbed his hands briskly. "Unless there's further business, perhaps you'd like a little something? I know I do; I have a cold kink in my guts."

The major grinned. "Liaison officers are permitted to drink on duty. Pour away."

Klythe poured. As he studiously watched the stream of liquor flow into one of the cups, he said: "Major, may I ask—ah—just how much danger there is to Earth?"

The major appeared to consider this for a moment before answering. "At the moment, none. We know that they can not trace us back here, and they're quite a long distance away. Without violation of confidence, I can say that the distance is several thousand light years."

"Thank you." Klythe passed the cups around.

Crayley eyed the major suspiciously. He had answered the question too readily. Was he lying? No. What, then? The major ran the tip of his tongue over his lips, and Crayley understood. He was going to trade information for information.

Stratford swirled his drink around in his cup and looked at the whirlpool it made. "Mr. Klythe, may I ask you a—a question?" It was properly worded, hesitation and all.

"I shall not be offended by your question," Klythe replied with the standard friendly acceptance of the gambit, "If you will not be offended by my reply."

The major whirled his cup once more, then downed its contents quickly. "I—uh—understand you took the Big Gamble." He paused to see how his opening would be accepted.

Klythe nodded. "I was honored to be chosen; how could I refuse?"

Crayley was enjoying the scene immensely. Both of the men were distinctly uncomfortable.

"I'm afraid I would have been —uh, well—afraid."

"Perhaps I was," Klythe said softly. "But I don't know. That whole year of my life is gone. That's why they call it the Big Gamble, you know; you bet one year of your life against the chance that you'll get an additional century or two. I don't know whether I was frightened or not."

"I'm very happy for you," said the major, closing the subject.

Crayley held out his cup for another drink.

The Big Gamble had paid off for Berin Klythe. The year-long physical reconstruction had not resulted in his death, as it had for so many. But Klythe's gamble hadn't paid off for Lewis Crayley.

Klythe held the Directorship.

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Crayley was in line for the position. Klythe would never leave of his own accord. It came out as a simple equation in symbolic logic.

Before Klythe had been offered the chance for the Big Gamble, Crayley had been content to wait. At sixty, Klythe had been thirty years older than Crayley. Normally, he would have retired at seventy-five. He would have another forty years of life to go, but they would not be productive years. But if you survived the Big Gamble, you were in better health, both physically and mentally, than you had been at twenty-five. By the time Klythe was ready to retire, Crayley would be dead.

Therefore, Klythe had to go.

THE THREE MEN finished their drinks; the major shook hands all around, and left quietly.

Klythe's eyes narrowed as he looked at the door through which the Space Force officer had departed. "Running in their own recording technicians on us, eh, Lew? Well, by God, we'll see about that! They'll be working under me; I'll make 'em jump!"

"Jump it is, Berin." Crayley's voice was quiet, but his blood was singing.

The Space Force Research Command team delivered the original two days later. It was obvious that the thing was not a drive generator. The sub-nucleonic converter had been elongated along the acceleration axis and reduced a bit in diameter. Evidently the Space Force wanted a high-velocity beam without much actual volume of energy.

The thing looked like an overdecorated length of sewer pipe instead of having the normal converter's barrel shape.

Crayley himself had accepted delivery of the original. He wanted to have a good look at it before Klythe did. He prowled around it, a handful of schematic prints in his hand, checking the symbols on the schematic against the reality of the converter before him.

For the first time in his life, he wished he knew the theory behind a converter. That wasn't his job, of course, but he had a hunch it would be useful knowledge.

He knew *what* a standard converter did, but he didn't know *how*. Therefore, he only knew approximately what this new modification would do.

The Space Force technicians stood off to one side, waiting respectfully for Crayley to finish his examination. Crayley could feel their eyes on him, and he knew full well that the respectful attitude was only superficial; a Space Force man has respect only for the officers above him.

When he was thoroughly satisfied that he could learn nothing

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more from a superficial examination of the machine, he turned to the technicians. "All right, let's go upstairs. Mr. Klythe wants to talk to you."

It was the incident in the hall of the executive offices that decided Lewis Crayley once and for all that he now had not only a motive but a method for murdering Berin Klythe.

As the recording technicians were filing into the briefing room, Berin stepped out of the lift tube and headed toward the door. Several other engineering executives of North American Sub-nucleonics followed him.

Klythe started to walk in through the door of the conference room, and one of the Space Force techs stepped on his toe. It wasn't painful, and it wasn't done on purpose; the tech was quite polite when he said, "Excuse me, sonny."

Klythe said nothing, but his eyes blazed with sudden anger, and his face grew crimson as he tried successfully to suppress it.

Behind his face, Crayley grinned gleefully. He rubbed his nose with a concealing hand.

Inside the room, as they all seated themselves in the chairs, Crayley watched the face of the man who had done the toe-mashing. He was solidly-built, young, good-looking in an ugly sort of way, sensitive and intelligent, as a waldo recorder had to be. When Klythe walked up behind the desk and said: "Good morning, gentlemen: I'm Berin Klythe," the tech's eyes opened a little wider for a fraction of a second, but there was no further reaction. Crayley was satisfied; he turned to watch Klythe.

Klythe was furious, but there was nothing he could do about it. The crimson in his face had died, to be replaced by the faint pallor of anger.

"You may ask me questions later," he said bluntly. "Right now, I'd like to ask you one. Which one of you is co-ordinator here?" One of the men stood. "Your name? Russ? Mr. Russ, may I ask why the Space Force felt that our recording men were not capable of doing this job?"

Russ fumbled uncomfortably. Finally: "Well, sir, this gadget is of—uh—rather radically new design. Since we, as a team, had built the various designs that led up to this one, our superiors felt that we would have a better working knowledge of the piece. They felt it would save time if we made the recording. I'm sure there was no slight intended to your own recording staff."

"I see," Klythe said coldly. "Very well." He turned his head a fraction and looked directly at Crayley. "Lew, what do you think the Space Force will do next time? Send over their own Director?"

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The Space Force men looked embarrassed, and Crayley smiled one-sidedly. Nobody but Klythe could have gotten away with that crack. Berin Klythe had been trained by, and had worked under, no less a person than the great Fenwick Greene, acknowledged Grand Old Man of the profession. Crayley recalled that Fenwick Greene, too, had been offered and had survived the Big Gamble.

Klythe began asking questions about the new unit. His tone was sarcastic, and his manner biting. He spent better than an hour singling each man out for some remark about his ability or lack of it.

When he was finally through, he leaned forward on his desk, his knuckles white. "All right, let's get busy and build this thing! But we'll build it my way, understand?"

None of the technicians said a word.

KLYTHE TURNED and headed for the door, followed by Crayley and the other engineers. Silently, the technicians followed after.

The original model of the generator lay on a work table in one of the recording rooms. Around it were the recording stations, the seats and controls each of the techs would occupy.

Klythe waved at the seats. "All right, *men*—to begin with, each of you occupy your regular team position. Let's get this thing disassembled. I want to see how it goes."

The model was just that—a model. It had been built with ordinary metal and plastic; it could never be energized. The wiring was copper, the casing of steel. But it had been built as carefully and with as great precision as if it had actually been constructed of the fiercely radioactive materials that would go into the production models.

The recorders seated themselves around the hulking object, checking and rechecking the intricate controls of the waldoes they were to operate. Finally, they fitted their hands into the glove pickups and waited, watching Klythe.

"Set?" Klythe asked.

"Set!" they said in one voice.

Klythe tapped his finger on the control board at which he had seated himself. The technicians began to disassamble the model, stripping it down to its last essential part, as Klythe watched with a critical eye.

Klythe had tapped the board, but he hadn't actually energized the gloves. This was to be a dry run; there was no need to record a disassembly; it was the assembly that would go down on tape.

It took an hour to complete the job, and all that time Klythe

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said nothing. He watched the men work, eying each move, each nut removed, each wire unwound.

When it was over, the men folded their hands in their laps, and Klythe tapped the control board once more.

"Let's see if we can't assemble it a little faster than that," he said coldly. He pressed the recording button, and the technicians began rebuilding the model.

Crayley stepped over to the monitor screen set in one wall of the recording room and switched it on. Then he cut in the experimental secondaries, connecting them to the recording primaries. They went through the same motions, their arms waving and gesticulating oddly in the air, since there was nothing for them to work on.

Klythe wasn't silent during the rebuilding. The disassembly had taught him everything he needed to know about the new unit; that was his job and his genius.

"Seven! Move that plate in straight next time! And you, Four, keep your guides straighter!" His voice rang clearly and concisely in the huge room. "Eighty-four! Don't wait so long before you hit that welder! As soon as Nine moves his left away from the shell, hit it!"

Little things, small savings of time, but they added up to greater efficiency in the long run. Klythe watched for every wasted motion, every fumble, every tiny error in timing or spacing, and corrected it with a whiplash voice.

When they had put the model completely back together, they folded their hands and looked at Klythe. Klythe jammed his finger down on the stop button and set the machine to erase the tape they had just made.

He scowled at the men. "I have seen more fumble-fingered recorders," he said acidly, "but they were trainees." He sighed as though his burden was too much. "All right. Rip her down and let's try it again."

The next time through, he was even more vituperative. If a man made an error the second time, Klythe was not above insults—personal ones.

An emergency call came in for Crayley. Something wrong on the second level. He stepped out the door in the middle of one of Klythe's high-tension blasts at a technician.

All the way down to the second level, Crayley was happy.

IT TOOK three days of hard work to pound all the kinks out of the recorders' technique. Not all, actually; Klythe still expressed dissatisfaction.

Crayley was in Klythe's office on the morning of the fourth day, sitting on Klythe's desk and smoking one of Klythe's cigarettes.

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"The whole damned crew are butterfingers," Klythe was complaining. "I think they've all got arthritis. Why, oh, why couldn't they let me use my own crew?"

"Speed things up, I suppose," Crayley said cautiously.

"Oh, hell yes! Speed things up! Sure, I'll admit that it would have taken my boys a little time in disassembly to get the hang of this new generator, but we'd have made it up in recording time. That's the way the goddam military mind works! Nuts!"

Crayley rubbed the tip of his nose with a finger. "Is the team ready for recording today?"

Klythe grinned. "As close as they'll ever be. It takes time to get a team accustomed to my way of doing things. They hate my guts for the way I've yelled at them. But it's as much my fault as theirs. If their own engineer were to take over one of my crews, he wouldn't have any better results. The military just has to do things differently, that's all."

They recorded that afternoon. This time, when Klythe pressed the starter, he said nothing. Only his hands and eyes directed the men through their tasks. And every motion of the men's fingers and arms sent their special impulses to the recording tape that hummed through the machinery.

Crayley looked out from behind his face and smiled secretly.

When the recording was finished, Klythe nodded with satisfaction. "I think we could have shaved a few more seconds off that," he said, "but it'll do. Now disassemble it and we'll run her through on the tape."

They took the model down below to the radiation-proofed assembly tables for the test. The thing was pulled to pieces and each piece positioned. Then Klythe threw the switch that started the waldoes.

The tape purred through the pickup head, transmitting the little bits of information it had received, squirting little pulses of energy to the steel-and-plastic arms that jutted out of the domes atop the pillars. In exact duplication of the men's motions, the waldoes picked up the pieces and put them in their proper places.

It was like a great four-dimensional jigsaw puzzle. Each piece not only had to be located properly in space, but placed there at just exactly the right time. If there were any bugs in the recording, now was the time to find out. When the real thing was assembled, mistakes could be costly.

But there were no flaws in the recording. The model was rebuilt exactly as the men themselves had rebuilt it. That was Klythe's genius; he worked for perfection and got it.

Klythe looked at the model after the last pair of hands had

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fallen inert, and nodded slowly. Then he climbed all over the model, checking for errors. The interior circuits were tested electrically, one by one and in coordination with each other. The test machines showed it clear.

Finally, Klythe said: "I think it'll do. But now we'll disassemble it again by hand—slowly, this time—and see if we've screwed up anywhere."

That night, Crayley went out and got drunk. He sat by himself, grinning and thinking secret thoughts in a booth at the *Peg & Wassail,* dropping coins in the slot and dialing one beer after another. He managed to maneuver himself home at three o'clock in the morning, singing softly to himself.

He woke up with a horrible headache, but he felt wonderful inside.

SURE ENOUGH, Berin was in his usual state of "first-run jitters." Crayley had been a little afraid that Klythe's enthusiasm wouldn't be up to par on this project, but it evidently was.

He was rubbing his hands together, a nervous smile playing around his mouth, coming and going unpredictably.

"Well, we'll see today. Major Stratford will be here with the Space Force Research Staff at fourteen hundred to watch the first one off. I hope the bugs aren't too rough on us."

"Nothing will go wrong," Crayley assured him.

"That's easy to say," Klythe grumbled, "but you know how things can go at the last minute. I'm worried about those tensile differences."

Crayley stroked his mustache and nodded. The material used in the interior of the model was supposed to approximate the highly radioactive material in the real thing as closely as possible, but there might be just enough difference in critical spots to require some small adjustments in the tape. If a man's hand applied just enough pressure and torque to twist a piece of copper wire just so, it might be too much or too little for a radioactive alloy wire that would be used in the same place in the production piece.

After the suppressor field had been switched on in the hull of the finished generator, the energy generated by the workings of the intensely radioactive interior would be compressed to the subnucleonic level, where it could be controlled. Unfortunately, the machine couldn't be built inside a suppressor field; that would be like trying to build a ship in a bottle when the bottle's neck was sealed shut.

Crayley said, "I've got a lot of stuff to do on Line Number Two this morning, but I'd like

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to see the run-off."

"Sure," said Klythe abstractedly, "come ahead."

Crayley didn't go to Number Two. He headed directly for the recording room. All he needed was ten minutes alone in there. Provided, of course, that it was empty.

IT WAS. Crayley took a quick look up and down the corridor and stepped inside. He locked the door behind him. If anyone tried to come in, he'd be able to cover. It was better to have someone wonder why the door was locked than to be caught messing with the tapes when he shouldn't be. Of course, if someone did try the door, it would mean that his chance of getting Klythe this time would be gone. But there would always be another time.

First, the tape. He flipped open the cover to the receiving reel. Sure enough, it was still there from yesterday's trial run, a huge reel of foot-wide blue plastic ribbon. Good enough.

He punched the "fast" button and ran it through to the last few minutes of the recording. He glanced at the monitor screen. The model was still on the assembly table in the tunnel deep underground.

He cut off the current to the secondaries and switched on the manual controls. Then he put his hands into one set of gloves and wiggled his fingers. The secondaries in the room below remained motionless.

Number Nineteen Experimental ought to be empty. He withdrew his hand and turned the selector knob on the monitor screen to Nineteen. No one there. He switched on the power, letting the last few minutes of the taped recording feed into the secondaries in Nineteen.

The waldoes in the screen went through the motions of finishing the assembly—meaningless gestures in the empty air—then fell into the "ready" position. Crayley hit the stop button, then switched back to the tunnel where the model lay.

He took a deep breath. Now came the touchy part. He hadn't handled a pair of primary waldoes for years, and this thing had to be done just right.

He had already decided which of the positions he would have to use and what he would have to do. Now, if only his timing was good. It didn't have to be perfect; that was the beauty of the plan. But it did have to be pretty close.

He turned on the waldoes without turning on the recorder and slipped his hands into the gloves. Then, using the foot switch, he kicked on the close-up screen for the position he was occupying. The screen showed the secondaries of the hands he was

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using. He wiggled his fingers. The secondaries wiggled theirs.

Then he reached out and gingerly touched the model. The secondaries touched the steel plate, and the feedbacks sent back a signal. Crayley's gloves felt the resistance just as though the model were right there in the room.

Several times, he reached out his right hand to one particular spot on the model, practicing to make sure he could hit it every time. Fine, fine.

Then he took his left hand out of the glove, eyed the wall clock, and turned on the recorder. The tape began to move through the recording heads. For five minutes he waited.

Then, suddenly, he reached out with his right hand and grabbed the regulator coil housing on the side of the model. As soon as his fingers touched it, he hit the cut-off for the secondaries, knowing the primaries would continue to record. He didn't want to ruin the model. Simultaneously, he punched the high-power switch.

His right hand, in the primary, grasped at mid-air and jerked down violently.

The thing was done. Had he forgotten anything? He thought for a moment. No. All was well.

He cut off the recorder and started to shut off the primaries when his eyes went to the screen. The secondary arm was still frozen where he had left it, grasping the regulator coil housing!

He shuddered. If he'd missed that . . .

Quickly, he lowered the secondary to the "ready" position.

Had he forgotten anything? Anything at all?

He thought not, but he went over the whole thing in his mind again, step by step, to make sure.

Nothing wrong, nothing missing. Fine. He wiped out the inside of the primary gloves and walked to the door. No need to worry about any other prints; he had been in that room often, and it might look funny if the whole place was wiped clean. As a matter of fact, he really didn't need to worry about the primaries; the grid inside them probably wouldn't take a print anyway. Still, there was nothing like being cautious.

He opened the door and stepped out as if he had every right to be there. No use peeking around corners; that would only rouse suspicion.

He strolled on down the corridor to the tube lift. He felt wonderful. He actually grinned with his face. There was no one around to see it.

THE JOB he had to do in Number Two kept him busy until well after fourteen hundred, as he intended it should. He didn't want

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to get there early, but he wanted to have a good excuse for being late.

He actually walked into the monitor room for Number Nine Production Tunnel at fifteen-twenty. The Space Force officers were gathered around the screen watching the unit take shape under the deft, mindless fingers of the waldoes. The weird blue glow of radioactivity obscured the finer details a little, but the operation was worth watching.

Major Stratford turned as he came in. "Hello, Mr. Crayley. I thought you were down below with Mr. Klythe."

Crayley stroked his mustache and smiled a little. "I had some work to do," he said apologetically. "I didn't get through until a few minutes ago. I figured this would be as good a place to watch from as down below."

Stratford grinned. "I suppose so. One screen is as good as another."

They watched. Stratford introduced him around to the other Space Force officers, including a short little man with nervous eyes named Colonel Green who was evidently Stratford's superior. Then everything became silent as they watched the generator being built.

Crayley smiled inwardly as he saw that the hulking generator had already blocked off the view of the one waldo he'd gimmicked. No one would be able to see what happened on the screen, and those who saw it directly wouldn't tell anyone.

Exultant, Crayley watched the screen through the mask of his face. Very shortly, he would again be Director. When Klythe had gone to Denver to take the Big Gamble, he'd left Crayley as Acting Director, with the stipulation that he was to become Permanent Director if Klythe failed to live through the grueling torture of the Rejuvenation chambers. Naturally, Crayley had had every right to feel that the position was already his. He had never considered that Klythe might be one of those few who would live through the Big Gamble.

Even when Klythe had come back, Crayley hadn't immediately considered him as a block in his path; there was always the chance of the Breakdown.

Sometimes something went wrong with Rejuvenation, even when the patient lived through the year. Instead of being better than normal, the body went out of kilter. Some little thing, probably—they hadn't pinpointed it yet. A gland that malfunctioned, a nerve blockage, something. Whatever it was, the rejuvenee suddenly began to age rapidly after a few months, dying of acute senility within the year.

But when a year had passed

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and Berin Klythe was as healthy as ever, Lewis Crayley had begun to plot murder. And now the plans had matured; soon they would bear fruit. Soon he would be Director—*Permanent* Director. As Director, it would be easy to erase the end of that tape before anyone else got their hands on it. He, himself, would be the one to head the investigation of the accident.

Crayley watched the assembly impatiently from behind his face.

The hands and arms and fingers of the waldoes in the screen worked together with precision as they put the last finishing touches to the generator unit. Finally they were finished; the arms assumed the "ready" position.

Crayley almost held his breath. Everything depended on Klythe now. Klythe, with his impatience, his pride in a piece of work well done, his eagerness to be sure of perfection; Klythe himself was the only weak link in the chain that led to his own death.

The tunnel was still flooded with radioactivity. In production, that wouldn't matter; the next set would slide into place and the hands would begin again. But this was a test run; the record would be allowed to run to the end instead of recycling, while the huge pumps replaced the argon atmosphere with air suitable for breathing. The radioactive stuff was pumped to a cooling chamber, where its silent violence would be allowed to expend itself below the danger point.

Five minutes. Crayley could see in his mind's eye that tape running through the pickup head, running through five minutes of nothing. Then a light flashed above the door to the tunnel as the detectors signalled the all-clear. It was safe to enter the tunnel now.

Crayley found himself clenching his teeth for a fraction of a second before Klythe opened the door and stepped through. There was a long, almost timeless instant as Crayley watched Klythe's face on the screen. Then there was a sudden sound, a brilliant light, and the screen went dead.

CRAYLEY SMILED inside himself as he yelled and sprinted out to the tube lift. The hidden hand of the secondary had reached up and ripped off the regulator coil—housing, innards, and all. The resulting explosion had been felt, even up here, as a dull rumble.

The lower level was a mess. The emergency door had slammed down to prevent the spread of contaminated air, and the huge pumps were going full blast to clear the area. At the first door, Lesker, one of the safety engineers, stopped him.

"You can't go in there, Lew.

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One whiff of that stuff, and you'd be gone."

"What happened?" Crayley asked briskly.

Lasker shrugged. "Who knows? That new generator blew, somehow. Not much harm done, really; as far as we can tell, the only real damage was in the tunnel itself. The temperature must have averaged better than a thousand Centigrade for a few seconds, though it was a lot hotter than that at the center of the blaze. It's cooled down a little now, but that generator must still be burning." He stopped for a second, then: "Nobody got out of it alive. We're sending in the mobiles now. The secondaries in there won't work. It's going to be a rough job because we'll have to use cables; we couldn't possibly get a UHF beam through that static."

The safety men were setting up a monitor screen bank for the mobile waldoes. Two of them, four-foot wheeled robots with TV cameras mounted where human heads would be, rolled up to the closed door.

"It's safe in that first section," Lasker said. "Roll 'em in." He turned back to Crayley. "You'd better get on a radiation suit if you want to watch this. We've got to seal off this section from the rest and open up the corridor all the way down to let the cables through. There's still a lot of hot air in there in spite of the pumps."

Crayley climbed into a suit and adjusted the air flow. Then he walked over to where the safety technicians were putting on the primary gloves for the mobile waldoes. From each control board, a long snake of cable ran to the mobile it controlled. The safety men switched on the power and the mobiles rolled down the corridor out of sight.

Crayley watched their progress over the shoulder of one of the safety techs. The screen showed the walls of the corridor sliding by. Then there was a shifting as the camera panned to the left. After several more turns, the robot came to the door of Tunnel Nine. The door itself lay crumpled against the far wall. Two bodies lay near it. The robot glided into the tunnel itself.

The inside of the tunnel was still fiercely hot; the new generator glowed a yellow orange, and the waldo secondaries had been warped and ruined by the heat.

And on the floor, human in shape only, lay what had once been Berin Klythe.

The mobiles went to work to take care of the glowing hulk of the ruined generator.

Crayley looked at the safety engineer. "There's not much I can do down here," he said. "You take care of the bodies, will you?"

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Lesker nodded. He seemed suddenly to realize that he was speaking to the new Director. "You can shuck your suit in the next section. I'll let you know how things are going."

Crayley felt quite light-hearted by the time he reached the upper levels again. In fact, he was almost ready to sing. It had been so easy, so simple! They had called Berin Klythe a genius and given him a chance at the Big Gamble; well, let them see who was the genius now! The plan itself had been a stroke of genius.

There was only one thing left to do; slip into the control room and erase the tail end of that tape. The explosion would go down as "unexplained." Berin Klythe had died in an industrial accident — and Lewis Crayley would replace him.

WHEN HE opened the control room door, only his mask of a face saved him. The room was full of men.

"What's going on here?" he asked softly.

One of the younger engineers turned toward him. "These men say they're going to confiscate the tape, Mr. Crayley." He waved in the direction of the uniformed Space Force men.

Crayley looked mildly at Major Stratford. "I'm Acting Director here, Major. I'm afraid I can't let you take our property."

The major turned to the smaller man standing nearby. "Colonel, perhaps you'd better—"

"I'll take care of it," the smaller man said choppily. "We're not confiscating it, exactly, Mr. Crayley. The tape will remain where it is. Immediately after the accident, I phoned the Executive Secretary at the capital. He is sending down an investigating board by special jet."

"May I ask why this rather high - handed action, Colonel Green?"

The colonel patted the air with a nervous hand. "Calm yourself, Mr. Crayley. I am Fenwick Greene; the 'colonel' is merely a military title I have to put up with."

"*Fenwick* Greene," It was one of the few times in his life that Crayley's screen, his wall, his defense, collapsed. "My—my apologies, sir! I didn't realize—I mean, I had no idea it was you—in the Space Force!"

He had never seen Fenwick Greene's picture, of course. No newspaper would dare commit such a flagrant violation of privacy.

Greene accepted Crayley's hand for a few seconds, then withdrew his own hand. "I was—ah—drafted," he explained.

Major Stratford smiled. "When the Space Force needs men, they pick the best."

Crayley nodded dumbly. Fen-

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wick Greene was undoubtedly the greatest co-ordination engineer who had ever lived. The late Berin Klythe couldn't hold a candle to him. His waldo recordings were like symphonies of precision and speed. Someone had once said that, given enough recording technicians and enough time to train them his way, Fenwick Greene could build a spaceship faster than parts could be made for it. It was an exaggeration, of course, but it showed what the trade thought of Fenwick Greene.

Greene tapped his teeth with his thumbnail. "We aren't confiscating the tape; we simply want it run. We're guarding it."

"Why?" Crayley asked bluntly.

Greene pulled a folded sheet of paper from his pocket. "This is a communication from Berin Klythe to the Construction Command of the Space Force. In it, he notified us that the test would be run today. He also says—" Greene held up the paper. "Quote: 'due to the fact that the Space Force has insisted that I use their technicians for the recording of this unit, I hardly feel I can claim that the recording is up to my usual standards. Had I been permitted to use my own men, I am sure better construction would have been obtained.'" Greene replaced the paper in his pocket.

"Naturally," he continued, "we don't think there is anything really wrong with the recording. Klythe, like myself, was a perfectionist. However, we would like to have the tape played before an examining board in order to clear ourselves and possibly clear Berin's own name. I watched the construction from beginning to end, and I could find no fault with it. However, we want a qualified board to check it. You see—" He coughed apologetically. "—I trained those technicians myself."

Crayley nodded. "I see."

There was nothing he could do. If he objected, they'd know who gimmicked the tape. Well, no matter. They'd know how Berin Klythe had died, but they wouldn't know who had done it.

He was in hot water, and he knew it, but he wasn't licked yet.

IF ONLY he hadn't tried to play his part so well! If only he'd gone straight to the control room instead of down below! Nothing to do about it now, he told himself. He couldn't waste time wishing he'd done something else; he had to see what could be done next.

Two hours later, the big jet job carrying the special Executive inquiry board landed on the roof of North American Subnucleonics. Crayley himself had to do all the honors. As Acting Director, he had to play host to

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the men who were—although they did not know it yet—investigating the murder of Berin Klythe.

That was the way Crayley thought of it. The fact that four other men had died with Klythe was immaterial; it meant nothing in the final analysis.

Crayley decided that his best bet was to mislead them. When they saw the extra operation at the end of the tape, he'd do his best to make them think it was a case of sabotage. Someone—probably South Asian Generators, Unltd.—had sent a man in to wreck the unit. Or perhaps bribed one of the technicians. South Asian was perennially trying to get the Space Force contract.

They used the model for the investigation run. The technicians tore it down and placed it on the table. Crayley tried to get to the control panel to run the tape through, hoping he could jab the erase button as soon as the tape was through and the model built, but Fenwick Greene was there ahead of him.

They switched the secondary control over to the experimental room. Half of the inquiry board went there to watch the process first-hand, while the other half watched it from the screens in the control room. They had cameras watching it from every angle this time; they didn't miss a thing.

Greene started the tape and watched closely, his eyes darting from screen to screen as the generator dummy took shape.

Greene's eyes missed nothing. There was actually no necessity for the dummy to be there, as far as he was concerned; he could read the motions of a set of secondaries as accurately as an average man could read a page of print. What appeared to be meaningless wavings in empty air were deft, purposeful action to Fenwick Greene. Mentally, he could see every component as the fingers grasped it. But the inquiry board could work better with a model actually on the board.

Finally it was over. The secondaries fell to the ready position. Crayley had five minutes to get to that erase button.

Fenwick Greene didn't move from the control panel.

"Gentlemen," he said, "that was a beautiful job. I don't think that even I could improve on it much. In my opinion, there is no reason why that unit should have blown." He paused, looking at one of the designers. "Unless, of course, there is something amiss in the theory or design. That, naturally, is out of my province."

There was discussion back and forth among the men.

Crayley's nerves tightened as the minutes slipped away. Would that fool Greene never step away

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from the control board, even for a minute? Why didn't he shut the damned thing off?

He finally gave up and forced himself to relax. It was too late now. He'd have to talk fast.

"Look!" one of the men snapped. He was pointing at one of the screens. Right on schedule, the waldo's arm reached up, grabbed the regulator coil housing, and ripped it off.

There was an excited babble of voices, and Crayley forced himself to look as flabbergasted as the rest.

The hand dropped down again to the ready position.

Crayley turned to Greene and started to say something that would keep the board's mind on the sabotage track, but he noticed that everyone was looking at the screen again. He swiveled his head around.

The secondary hand had lifted into the air. It extended its forefinger and made meaningless motions.

Crayley's jaw muscles tightened. What the devil did it mean? How had *that* got on the tape?

The hand dropped. There came a faint chime which signaled the end of the tape.

"Let's run through that again," said Fenwick Greene, an odd note in his voice.

Crayley didn't understand. Had the shrewd, calculating eyes of Fenwick Greene read meaning into that meaningless movement?

Again the hand lifted into the air, extended a finger, and moved it. Then it dropped.

Crayley started to move his own hand, and stopped it in midair. He knew in that instant what the gesture was.

The rest were talking, buzzing among themselves; no one was looking at him yet. Only Fenwick Greene gave him a short, sharp glance.

Greene ran the tape back through for a third replay, and watched the hand lift again.

Crayley stared at it as if hypnotized. His mind was a mass of self-hatred. Fool! Fool! *Clumsy fool!* This was it; this was the end of everything. It wouldn't take them long now—they'd at least have enough evidence to use a lie probe on him. Someone would see it. Someone would see how Lewis Crayley's subconscious mind had betrayed him when he'd made the recording.

Fenwick Greene saw it. His eyes moved from the screen to Crayley's face.

"You," he said very softly. "You're the only one who has one."

And Crayley knew he was right. If there had been a head on the waldo, they'd have understood instantly.

The finger was stroking an invisible mustache. ∞ ∞

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The Orifice opened Earth's door to the invaders—and it was a door that had no lock!

TROJAN HEARSE

by HARLAN ELLISON

THE AGENT flickered, wavered, and disappeared. A smell of ozone filled the War Chamber.

There was a momentary silence, then the plasteel-armored guards fired at the spot. Angry bursts of flame erupted from their rifles and a section of the wall blistered and exploded inward. Shards of plasteel wall material showered the assembled War Council.

"Imbeciles!" The sharp voice of Lord Fiagore froze the guards in mid-movement. "He's gone, you fools! A personal Orifice—he was gone the moment he touched the button! Out, get out!"

The guards paled; in a moment they were gone, and the triple-locked door to the War Chamber was sealed. Then Fiagore turned on his Council. Hatred and a vague desperation clouded his eyes. His voice rang like an anvil: "An agent! An agent! Right here in my Council, a Terran agent!" Lord Fiagore's cheeks blew into a red fury; he beat at the padded arms of his chair. "Who is responsible? Who is the man who checked that—that *agent?*"

Setaspear pushed back his chair at the Lord's right elbow and stood, wearing an almost dedicated air. "Your Mightiness," he said, bowing his head and touching his forehead with two fingers, "it was I who believed the man's story and references. I am the one who put him on the research team for this operation."

He stopped abruptly, licked his lips. "If punishment is to be

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meted out—I am the responsible party."

He sat down again. No one looked at him; nervous coughs floated in the War Chamber. Fiagore carefully steepled his thin fingers and looked across with dark, brooding eyes.

"If it were not you, Setaspear—" He left the sentence hanging. But everyone there knew the bonds of friendship that bound the two men—bonds that stretched back through many years and many campaigns. Such ties were not easily broken.

Even in such an alarming situation as this.

Lord Fiagore sank back in his chair. His face, mottled by deep pools of shadow, was unreadable, but his voice betrayed his emotion. "What does this do to the situation. Is it as bad as I think?" He looked quickly toward Setaspear.

The other licked dry lips and leaned forward. "I don't think so, Your Mightiness. It merely means we can't take them entirely by surprise."

Fiagore was silent, as he compared what his War Minister had said with the data he already possessed.

The armada was ready, lined rank on formidable rank before the Orifice. Death in seven hundred shapes crouched on plasteel treads, waiting for the order that would launch them through the gigantic hoop, into inverspace, and materialize them instantaneously on earth, far across the galaxy.

"Did he have the complete set of diagrams and specifications?" Lord Fiagore inquired. His voice had steadied.

A dark, fat man near the far end of the long Council table stood. "Yes, Your Omnipotence. He was with the research team bringing them here. He waited till the Supervisor had removed them from the field-proof case, activated his personal Orifice, and took them to wherever the cursed Terrans had instructed him."

Fiagore waved the man to silence impatiently. "We all saw it, Belle; sit down."

Setaspear touched the War Baron's arm. "I do not believe this will hamper us in the slightest, Your Greatness. What if the Terrans *do* have the specifications for the Orifice? Even though we have known the principle for many years now, it was only recently that our research teams perfected a full-sized, stable Orifice. It took our top men three years to design and construct the large one. How can the miserable Terrans hope to find a defense against it in a mere five weeks?"

"There is no way they can counteract the Orifice? You're certain?"

"Certain, Your Greatness? Of *course* I'm certain! Our armada

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has been ready and waiting for six months. All we await are the reserve fleets of demolition trucks from Demaquor and Berenace. When they arrive, we strike!"

He was on his feet, his hungry face alight with anticipation. "The Orifice activated, our fleets will roll into it—disappear here—and suddenly appear on Terra, behind any defenses they might set up, cannons firing, destroying as they come—"

"Setaspear!" The War Baron snapped. "Sit down, man! You make a fool of yourself!" But it was easy to see that the War Lord was reassured.

He steepled his fingers once more, speaking quietly. "Interstellar war has never been feasible. Distances were too great. But now—with the Orifice, using inverspace and the field—we can become the mightiest planet in the universe! Nothing can stand before us! Let the Terrans be the first to know this. Steal our plans? Let them! In five weeks, we strike!

"For the Mother World and the Lord!"

The assembled Council members leaped to their feet. Their voices shattered against the walls of the War Chamber:

"For the Mother World and our Lord!"

THE WAR EFFORT had been carefully planned. It had been three hundred years since the last Kyben war, and the Lords had grown frightened of their position. Kyba had always been a war planet—no home industries of any real importance had ever been developed—living off its plunder. The people *wanted* war; they were geared to a life of constant preparation for battle. War it had to be—and three hundred years was too long a peace.

This end of the galaxy was under Kyben rule. To the very farthest edge of rocket travel, all planets were in Kyben thrall. But nothing could be done about the worlds "over there."

Until the giant Orifice—an instantaneous matter transmitter—had been constructed. Now space to the other side of Eternity was open, and the Kyben might overwhelm anyone in its way throughout the galaxy.

And Terra was the first circle on the war maps.

O-DAY came, and the impulse sped from Research Center to the plain where the Orifice stood—a towering, glistening metal hoop, poised on its thin edge, like a portal. Suddenly the power poured into it, activating the field. The center of the hoop grew misty, glowed with a faint pink luminescence.

Commanders tossed sharp glances at their ring-com units, waiting the signal.

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When it came, the blast and roar of machines springing to life rolled back against the far mountains, smashing toward the sky with a fury of impatience. Dust rolled up in huge clouds as the war-tanks bit deep into the ground, their treads grinding it fine as they would grind fine the earth of Terra.

In the ranks, row on uncountable row of death machines inched forward toward the wavering pinkness of the Orifice.

The lead tanks of the fleets positioned themselves carefully, their Commanders directing from transparent plasteel conning bubbles, faces bright with sweat, eyes gleaming with the inner fire of conquest! The fire of destruction!

In the first tank Lord Fiagore nodded his head to his driver, and the armada plunged into inverspace.

THEY *hadn't needed three years. They hadn't even needed the full five weeks. When the agent flickered into existence in the high command offices, he turned over the plans, and his personal Orifice, and the work was completed in days.*

There was only one way to beat the invaders. It had been so obvious, they had overlooked it till it was almost too late.

But they had done the job in time, and now it was set.

The most vital bit of information the agent had learned, perhaps, was the location of the exit spot on Terra where the giant Orifice would expel its deadly horde.

Once they had that, there was no need even to arm the troops.

FIAGORE'S tank plunged into the misty, wavering pinkness, and everything flashed into negative. Black was white, white was ebony, and the War Baron knew that matter translation was sending them through inverspace.

Then everything snapped back into focus, and Fiagore saw sunlight again in the split-instant before the back end of the tank left the invader's Orifice . . .

. . . and the front end entered the defender's Orifice. Set directly in the path of exit, so close there was no way to stop, no way to turn back. No way to go but ahead.

And ahead, the Terran Orifice had been set to exit into the dead airless black of deep space.

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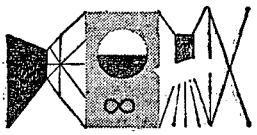
Infinity's Choice



by DAMON KNIGHT

In each issue, Mr. Knight will review several new books which he regards as worthy of special consideration.

DOUBLE STAR, by Robert A. Heinlein. Doubleday, $2.95.

The impersonation of a hero is, I suppose, one of the most overworked plot devices in fiction. There have been phony Tarzans wandering around the prop jungle, phony Supermen strutting in monogrammed tights; phony princes, presidents, etc., almost ad nauseam. But in this book Robert Heinlein demonstrates again that the boobs cannot put so many greasy fingermarks on an idea, that a good writer cannot lift it out shining and new.

Problem: John J. Bonforte, leader of one of the two chief political coalitions in the Solar Empire, has been abducted just before a Martian ceremony at which he must appear. Solution: a double—an at-liberty actor styling himself Lorenzo the Great. The impersonation, at first planned to last only a short time, has to be extended again and again, and in the process Lorenzo —and the reader—learns what it is like to be the elected leader of eight billion people.

I confess to mixed feelings about this book. It's as hypnotically written as the best Heinlein; the characters are as strong as ever, and in general the technical work is a joy to watch. Lorenzo, for instance, is not only an actor, which is refreshing—most doubles are merely long-lost twin brothers, or hoboes who when shaved bear a startling resemblance to Ronald Coleman—but he talks like an actor and thinks like an actor, which is vanishingly rare. The politics, too, is real politics, not the usual stale hash of ignorance.

But there's a point at which these virtues begin to generate an uneasy feeling that if they were

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only shaved and cleaned up a little, they would look like faults. Lorenzo's acting experience, for instance, seems to be less an extrapolation than a mishmash of the present-day stage, circus and TV. Bonforte might easily have been the premier of a somewhat smaller Empire, and even the Martian ceremony of adoption has a pretty obvious parallel in the recent political history of this country. What's left is science fiction—but there's very little left.

And yet the Mars of *Double Star,* if it's less romantic than that of *Red Planet,* is absolutely convincing. The Martians themselves are, by far, Heinlein's most imaginatively alien non-terrestrials to date, and I only regret the brevity of their appearance in the story. The narrative is always exciting, sometimes deeply moving —and there are one or two surprises I haven't mentioned. Most of all, I think the book is rewarding for the cumulative sense of Heinlein's own philosophy which it gives you, particularly in the unforgettable last lines. This is far from being a great book; but there's greatness in it.

THE CITY AND THE STARS, by Arthur C. Clarke. Harcourt, Brace, $3.75.

Here is a curious two-period piece—Clarke's first novel, *Against the Fall of Night* (Gnome, 1953), begun in 1937, and now rewritten and expanded by a maturer Clarke. Some of the changes are certainly improvements—as for instance the interesting polyp-creature whom Clarke substitutes for the old man in the crater of Shalmirane. Others are at least doubtful, like the sweeping innovation by which, in effect, Clarke turns all the inhabitants of Diaspar into golems; others, like the introduction of Alvin's girl-friend Alystra, are pure padding; and still others, it seems to me, merely illuminate the original faults of the story in greater detail.

The virtues of this story in its original, shorter version are considerable — the gentle, likeable characters, the nostalgic flow of the narrative, and similar things, all of which might be summed up under the word "charm." Of plot the story—in both versions—has just enough to get along, of excitement almost none. An even more serious lack, perhaps, is the almost total absence of any specific sensory quality in the writing. Unlike real cities, Diaspar has no characteristic architecture, no dominant color, no mood, no pervading sound . . . in short, it's exasperatingly thin; you can't touch, hear, see or smell it.

Much the same criticism could be made of the characters. The differences between them seem to be mostly accidents of circumstance; one feels that they could all be put back into the Hall of

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Creation as raw material (the fate which Clarke has in mind for them, anyhow), and with a little suitable alteration in conditioning, re-emerge in other roles—Alvin as Jeserac, or Jeserac as Khedron, or anybody as anybody else.

All the same, I find, the story has left vivid images in my mind—the golden grass of Lys, rolling in the wind; the jewel-brightness of the great insect Krif; the pulsing growth of the city of Diaspar, seen in speeded-up projection. However much the story invites you to cavil at it in detail—and there are a dozen places where I think Clarke is wrong—the whole is an evocative, oddly disturbing panorama. As in *Childhood's End,* I think, the smallness of the human characters is forgiveable: the real protagonist is time.

ALIEN FROM ARCTURUS, by Gordon R. Dickson (an Ace Double Novel, 35c.) is a thoroughly conventional science-adventure story with a number of astonishingly good things in it. Most of these seem to be the product of Dickson's good-natured but wacky sense of humor, as when he makes humanity, under the pressure of superior Galactic culture, flower into a screwball diversity of types—scientists with atomic pistols and Buck Rogers belts, armored Archaists on horseback, Neo-Taylorites in flowing robes preaching non-violence on street corners.

And only the co-proprietor of the Hokas could have invented Peep. Peep (whose full name is unwieldy) is a Galactic citizen, about three feet high, completely covered with fur. He has a pointy nose and long black whiskers. He is cuddly. He is also a short-tempered philosopher from a heavy-gravity planet, whose deep devotion to the cause of non-violence sometimes causes him to hurl grown men in all directions.

Peep has my vote for the most engaging extra-terrestrial in recent memory—and the funniest, bar none. He deserves to survive this routine novel, and I hope Dickson will see to it.

FARRAR, STRAUS AND CUDAHY have published a hardcover, and Bantam Books a paperbound, edition of *Forbidden Planet,* concocted by W. J. Stuart from the MGM production of the same name. The book as far as I was able to bear it is slickly written, by somebody who doesn't know the difference between a star and a constellation, thinks the relativity theory predicts infinite mass "at or past the speed of light," and can't multiply 186,000 x 360 without getting one too many zeroes.

Don't fail to miss this one. ∞

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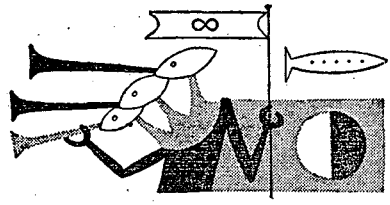
Fanfare



THE WINGLESS ROOSTER

by CHARLES BURBEE

Whenever something of suitable quality can be found, INFINITY will reprint an item from a *"fanzine"—one of the amateur journals published as a hobby by the more enthusiastic devotees of science fiction. "The Wingless Rooster" originally appeared in* 1944, *and has been reprinted several times, most recently in* Fantasy Sampler, *published by John W. Murdock, c/o Henry Moore Studio,* 214 *E.* 11*th St., Kansas City* 6, *Mo.*

So THEY began to study the wingless rooster carefully, from all angles. At first it was apparent that he had no wings and after four days of diligent analysis it became obvious that he had no wings.

The Findings Committee wrote up a 130-page report which in detail described the rooster. It gave 26 reasons or theories explaining his lack of wings. The report went on to say that he was just an ordinary rooster with the normal instincts of his species except that he was wingless.

As soon as the report was published, trickles of European scientists began to arrive. They wanted to see for themselves this oddment of nature. A number of tests were devised. None of them bothered the rooster. In fact he seemed to enjoy most of them, especially the ones which tested his food and sex drives. This left them more puzzled than before.

Knots of baffled scientists gathered day and night in the vast research labs. Amid the odors of thousands of gallons of black coffee thousands of theories were brought forth. Were the birds developing into wingless beings preparatory to taking over the earth? Mutating, as it were, into a higher type? Trading their wings for another organ? But close scrutiny had not uncovered any new organs. Therefore the trade must be an intellectual one. They set up IQ

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tests for him. He came out no better or worse than the rooster control group. This did not ease their minds. On the contrary, dismay and fear began to settle about them . . . perhaps the rooster was so smart he could hide his intelligence from them. Hide it because of humans who would slay him and his kind before the chickens could revolt in force. Perhaps he was but the vanguard of fowldom.

They set up ESP tests and the rooster failed to show any trace of unusual perceptions. Now they began to fear for the existence of humanity. They had the prickly feeling that the rooster was studying *them*.

This rooster, to all intents and purposes, was an ordinary rooster except that he was wingless. This was almost irrefutable proof that he was *not* an ordinary rooster. It was sinister. Not only was he not an ordinary rooster but he was so far above them in intelligence and perception that he could convince them, the most highly trained men in the land, that he was just an ordinary rooster.

The word went around—Destroy this super being, this crafty entity. Destroy him now! Before he destroys us! But it must be done quickly. The very first blow must be fatal, lest he retaliate with unthinkable reprisals. A simple wring of the neck? Hardly. Starvation? No.

At the first tightening of a hand around his neck he might suddenly display incredible strength and make his escape. If they tried to starve or poison him he might refuse food and begin to draw energy by tapping the fabric of space.

Who would say what nameless forces he controlled?

They kept him in a chamber with lead walls 18 feet thick while they assembled the greatest panoply of death-dealing instruments ever seen in time of peace. Flame-throwers, anti-aircraft guns (he might soar unexpectedly on jets), poison gas, machine guns, rockets, artillery, guided missiles.

Came D-Day.

The armed forces came. Each man had been carefully screened for security reasons. Tight radio beams connected all branches of the service. In the nearby ocean half the navy stood by. One hundred fighter planes stood by, engines idling, while their pilots lounged nearby, cracking jokes in the face of death. The whole proving ground area was a mass of machines and men. Everyone was tight-lipped. Cigarettes were being thrown away half-smoked.

The rooster was placed in the target circle. He strutted about, pecking at the few blades of grass growing there. They were amazed at his courage.

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In the sky a single plane circled overhead. No one knew, but it was whispered that it carried the Bomb, and if all else failed . . .

At the given word, all weapons were brought to bear on the rooster. He ignored them. Jaws were agape at his insouciance.

Suddenly he squawked, raced around a bit and dropped into the dirt, kicking a little. Not a weapon had been fired. Men, wearing asbestos suits, rushed recklessly to his twitching body. Examination showed that a small caliber projectile had entered his body where the left wing should have been and had not emerged from the other side.

He was dead.

Or so it seemed.

A small boy was brought over. Half-defiant, half-crying, he admitted he'd sneaked past the guards and had come in there to shoot gophers as he often did. Seeing the rooster, he thought he'd try a long-range shot. Sonic detectors had picked up the sound of the rifle's discharge and sixteen tracer lines had been slapped on him instantly. Radar equipped jeeps had run him down.

"Did I do anything wrong?" he whimpered. They told him no and let him go.

They let the rooster lie there for five days under the constant surveillance of the FBI. Floodlights lit the scene at night. When it seemed apparent that he was really dead they threw him into a huge pit and dumped carloads of corrosives on him, then filled the pit with reinforced concrete and quarantined the territory for two years.

The world had been saved.

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The Final Challenge

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

"Withdraw!" said that old, familiar voice. Could Delaunay obey, when he had finally found a world worth fighting for?

As soon as he heard the report of Tsalto's death, Delaunay went to make the traditional ritual obeisance before the dead father. Drawing near the house, he saw a long line of sorrowful Sallat moving slowly past the bitter-eyed old man, each in turn bending at the knees, touching

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fingers gently to temples, and depositing a pinch of salt on the growing heap before him.

Delaunay joined the procession, donning the green mourning shawl of the Sallat. When he reached Demet, who sat patiently waiting for the ceremony to end so that he might begin his own private mourning, Delaunay looked deep into his sad, gentle old eyes. Poor Tsalto, Delaunay thought.

He turned and moved on down the silent street toward his flat, thinking of Tsalto lying on a lonely hill somewhere near the Krozni border, and wondering how old Demet must feel now that the Krozni had killed his son.

As he approached the bright-painted door of his flat, he paused to listen to the sounds Marya made as she stirred busily around within, performing the blessings for their evening meal, and for a moment he forgot dead Tsalto and sad-eyed old Demet. An image flickered briefly through his mind: the bony-faced, untidy girl who had kept house for him a few months before his final break with Earth. He pictured her, mechanically feeding meat into a grinder, and compared her sullen expression with Marya's cheerful face.

He pushed open the door, removed his shoes, scrubbed his feet on the mat, and entered. Marya came running to the door with a little giggle of delight and kissed him. He felt a surge of pleasure at the warmth of her body in his arms, but pushed her away and made the formal greeting his gesture and pouting. "I

"I'm sorry," she said, returning his gesture and pouting. "I forgot you don't like that."

Delaunay shook his head and sank into his chair. No, he didn't like it. Kissing was something that belonged to Earth; kissing was something to be done with Earth girls, an empty custom best carried out by girls like the bony-faced slattern he had left behind. Here, among the Sallat, a kiss from Marya was a travesty of the pure, beautiful Sallat ways of love.

He drew her close and gently fondled her hands, feeling a little abashed at his brusqueness. He realized that Marya had simply been trying to show her love the way an Earth-girl might, thinking that would please him. She stil did not see that any reminder of the planet he had left behind only disgusted him.

HE STROKED her six tapering fingers affectionately, as if to underline the fact of her non-Earthliness by emphasizing her single distinguishing alien feature. Some day soon, he knew, he would have to explain to her just why he reacted as he did to her good-

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natured mimicking of Earth customs at the expense of the age-old Sallat ways.

"Time to eat," she said after a while.

Arm in arm they moved to the table, where Marya had arranged the food in the Circle of the Fourth Day. Delaunay allowed her to slide out his chair and sat down. She remained standing, since it was the Fourth Day.

"Demet has entered mourning," he said, reaching for a bread-fruit. "I attended the ceremony just now. The Krozni got Tsalto on their last raid."

Marya bowed her head. "Demet's son dead?"

"Yes," said Delaunay. He nearly added that it was Demet's own fault for bringing the Krozni to Sallat, but he did not say it aloud.

"The world is cold," Marya said, as if knowing his thoughts. "To think that the man responsible for saving them, for bringing them here, should give the life of his only son to them—"

"A judgment, perhaps?" said Delaunay.

"No. I feel sad when you talk like that. We had no way of knowing what the Krozni were like. All we knew was that their world was in danger, and Demet had no other path but to rescue them."

They ate silently for some minutes. Delaunay arranged and rearranged his thoughts, trying not to say anything that would let the Earth-bred poisons in his mind seep through to the surface. Earth was a planet of hate and haters. But he had left Earth, and his deepest wish was to keep all the hates of Earth from Marya.

Still he felt a dull, bitter resentment as he considered the situation. Fifty years ago Demet had been foremost among the Sallat, and when it was discovered that the neighboring planet, that of the Krozni, was due for destruction in a freak cosmic accident, it had been Demet who led the rescue of the squat, ugly, grey-skinned Krozni and brought them here.

At first the Krozni had been grateful, the way an animal is grateful when saved from some deadly peril. But their gratitude had not lasted long. They had established themselves firmly in the lands the Sallat had given them and grown stronger. In the last year, suddenly becoming incredibly fierce, they had begun raids on Sallat territories.

As ye have sown . . .

It was a good bit of irony, Delaunay thought, that the son of the man responsible for bringing the Krozni here had been one of the first to fall. If Demet had not been so noble, if he had left the Krozni to perish when their world crumbled, this threat to the Sallat would not exist now.

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Abruptly he threw back his chair and left the table. He stared out the window at the rolling Sallat landscape, ignoring Marya's worried glance. *I was thinking like an Earthman again.*

"Forgive me," he said out loud.

"For what?" Marya asked.

He felt the jaw-muscle just under his ear begin to twitch uncontrollably. "I'm still an Earthman," he said. "You ought to leave me."

She ran her hand lightly up his arm and squeezed his shoulder. "No."

"I'm still a hater," he said. "I was thinking that it was good for Demet that his son died, because Demet brought the Krozni here. But that doesn't make any sense, does it? I'm angry at Demet for having done a Sallat-like thing instead of an Earth-like thing."

"You're tired," said Marya calmly. "Why don't you rest?"

"No," Delaunay snapped. "I want to think."

She walked away to let him sulk, and he realized that next to her he was nothing more than a cranky adolescent, pounding away endlessly at himself for his criminal act of having been born on Terra instead of on Sallat.

He sensed a growing pulse of rage—no longer rage at poor old Demet, but rage at Earth and rage at himself and especially rage at the Krozni—and wondered how tiresome his emotionalism must be for Marya, who was so very young and so old all at once.

Yet he couldn't resist the anger at the Krozni, who were busily destroying the only society he had ever thought worthwhile. *Don't get involved,* something something warned inside, but he ignored it.

"How do *you* feel about the Krozni?" he asked her suddenly.

"Very sad," Marya replied. "I feel unhappy that they threaten us and kill men."

"That's just it," he said savagely. "You feel unhappy, that's all. But I hate them! I hate them for what they're doing to the Sallat—and I'm not even one of you!"

"You are lucky," she said. "We are too tired even to feel hate. And that is why the Krozni are killing us. You are fortunate to be able to hate."

"Sure," he said. "Fortunate."

BUT HE WAS fortunate, he thought, in a way. He stared into the darkness, gently stroking Marya's warm hand; she smiled in her sleep, a smile he found infinitely lovable.

There would be no sleep for him this night.

It could almost be amusing, he thought. Here he was: Edwin Delaunay, composer, musical theoretician, sometime piano teacher, who had deliberately cut

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himself loose from a sheltered, comfortable life on Earth because he had no interest in that declining, stultified planet, had come to an alien world and had become so involved in the conflict of a couple of non-human races that he was unable to sleep.

He tried to sort out the strands of the situation and analyze his feelings. He hated the Krozni as he had never bothered to hate Earth, and similarly he was drawn toward the Sallat he he had never been drawn toward his own society. He had left Earth because the everlasting routine of life, the sameness, the cliches, bored him so.

Is it hot enough for you?
Feelies are better than ever!
Don't be half-sane!

His rationalized motive for leaving was the decline of art on Earth. With the galaxy at its feet and no challenges left, Earth had declined the final challenge—itself—and had slipped easily into a deep, firm rut. No new colonies were planted, no major scientific developments recorded. No great novels were written, no music of the slightest value composed, no pictures worth a glance painted.

Delaunay remembered those long discussions in the cafe. He had not been the only one to see through the hollowness of Terran life; there had been others. Kennerly, with his interminable, unreadable novel - in - progress; Chavez, mounting a ladder to splash at his huge canvas. They had protested bitterly.

"The name of Earth's god is *Status Quo!*" Kennerly had shouted drunkenly. It was true, but no one listened. The Pax Terrana ruled the galaxy; the Council benignly ruled a united Earth. But as the long centuries of peace rolled on, the lives of five billion people rolled on too, on and on, in a gentle, steady, pointless course.

Kennerly and Chavez had protested. Delaunay had not; he had felt instead the urge to *withdraw*. He grimaced as he recalled the day he had pompously proclaimed what was virtually a declaration of irresponsibility. The next day he had packed up and headed for the outworlds.

He looked down at Marya as she slept, and smiled. Here, among the Sallat, he had finally become involved. Here, he found himself bound up in the life of the Sallat, for the first time loving and, for that reason, for the first time hating.

He walked to the window and looked out at the sleeping village. On Sallat he had found peace. *Here* was where he belonged. His musical studies, which most people had regarded as trivial dilettantism on Earth, were valued highly by the Sallat, and they had allowed him a glimpse at their own music, alien,

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difficult, endlessly fascinating. He found himself drawn to their dignified, tradition-conscious way of life. Yes, he belonged here.

And somewhere out there were Krozni.

THE MOURNING procession outside Demet's door was not the last. The Sallat were helpless before the gradual encroachment of the Krozni forces in the next few weeks.

The Sallat tried to go about their lives as if nothing were happening. Delaunay went ahead with his research into Sallat music, trying to master their maddening quarter-tone technique, but his mind was on the seemingly endless stream of bodies brought back from the borders. And the borders were drawing closer, too.

Delaunay joined each funeral procession, dropping his pinch of salt before the bereaved parent as custom dictated. And he waited, and wondered how long it would be before the Krozni were upon them.

"I'm still withdrawing," he told Marya, and she looked at him with large uncomprehending eyes. "I should be out there fighting back the Krozni, but I'm hedging away from action the way I did on Earth. Only here I shouldn't be doing that, should I?" She said nothing.

Demet was organizing the defense—old Demet, with the years heavy upon him. Delaunay watched the old man with tremendous admiration. Demet is still a man of action, he thought, and went to see the old man.

He was studying a map of the battle area, tracing circles with a stylus. "Their strategy is incredible," the old man said. "Their army appears from nowhere, strikes, vanishes, appears again somewhere else. I don't understand how they've learned so much so quickly."

He looked up at Delaunay, and Delaunay stared into the red-ringed depths of Demet's eyes as he had done on the day of Tsalto's mourning procession. "They will beat us," Demet said. "They are fighters, and we are not."

"How is the border defense going?"

"About as poorly as possible," Demet said. He smiled a little despite himself. "They march through our lines as if there were no one there. Our people simply do not know how to fight. I heard the report of yesterday: at sundown, while our men were at their evening devotions, the Krozni came upon them and killed them. But at least they remembered their devotions."

Delaunay nodded. The whole insane pattern was shaping up beautifully. Item: the Krozni had taken to making their heaviest assaults on First Day, when the

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Sallat would not fight. Item: the Krozni had shown no respect for holy days, for any of the beloved customs and rituals of the Sallat. Item: they had killed men at their prayers. Item: they had slaughtered men gathered together for traditional singing, slaughtered them like animals.

The trouble was that the Sallat soldiers were trying to be both Sallat and soldier at the same time, a fatal combination. But how could he tell that to Demet?

Can I tell him, Delaunay asked himself, that in order to beat the Krozni his soldiers will have to scrap their traditions, their ceremonies and customs? That their beautifully harmonic singing is a dead giveaway to the enemy about their position and numbers? That they are conducting this war like children?

Delaunay found that familiar, irritating feeling creep over him, the profound wish that he were somewhere else while all this went on. They had told him, long ago on Earth, Kennerly and Chavez and those other friends who had known him and worried over him, that he was incapable of involving himself in a Cause. And it was true. That disengaged quality of his pursued him even to Sallat. When it came to putting the cards on the table, to actually getting out and defending the Sallat against the Krozni, he drew back.

The pattern had eventually forced him to break with Earth. He saw clearly that he had to end that pattern now.

He faced Demet squarely. "Let me go out there and fight," he said. "I think I know some tricks that may help you."

HE CAME to regret that act of volunteering quickly enough. Demet put him in charge of a squad of light-hearted young Sallat who wielded flutes as well as rifles, and sent him to reinforce the tattered Sallat front line. Uneasily he watched them as they marched over the fertile plains to the battle area. He saw all too well why the Krozni were able to march through the Sallat lines as if they were not there.

Every evening, as the sun went down, the Sallat gathered faithfully for devotions. Each man put his weapons to one side and silently contemplated the sinking of the sun. When the great red orb had dropped below the horizon, they gathered together to sing their intricate songs of joy. Joy even in the face of destruction, Delaunay thought.

There was not much he could do about it on the way to the battlefield. The Sallat were proud of their songs, proud of their singing. It was more important to them to sing than to kill Krozni.

Delaunay watched their care-

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free journey through the woods, wondering when the Krozni would hear them and descend for a fearful massacre. He determined to begin immediately teaching the Sallat what war meant.

His second-in-command was a tall young Sallat named Blascon who was a virtuoso on the Sallat guitar, a formidable instrument with twelve dominant strings and twenty-two sympathetic ones. Delaunay watched him play, late one night, while they were camped in a thick copse to the east of the home village. His fingers skipped over the strings with a skill almost beyond belief.

Overcoming his professional interest in the performance, Delaunay steped out of the shadow of a huge tree and interrupted.

"That's pretty loud playing, Blascon," he said. He trembled a little; his campaign would live or die at this moment.

"No louder than proper," the Sallat replied, flashing a row of even, shining teeth. "The tonal relationships are so geared that if I played any softer, the sympathetic strings would conflict with the main melody and I'd have nothing. You know that, don't you?"

"Of course," Delaunay said. "But that's not what I mean when I say it's too loud."

This is it, he thought. Right here and now.

"I mean that we're at war," Delaunay said, slowly and patiently. "We're in a battle area. And you're making noise. Music's noise. Don't you realize that if the Krozni should hear the sound of your instrument we'd have them on us in no time? Can't you see?"

Blascon considered that for a moment. "What you're saying, then, is that I should give up playing my music *out of fear.* You want me to stop; you want me to turn into a beast like the Krozni."

THAT WAS IT. The Sallat were fiercely proud of their culture. It was all a matter of values.

It was the third day of their march; they were drawing near the Krozni encampment. Delaunay was sticky with fear. They were walking into sure death, proudly, almost triumphantly, strumming guitars and playing flutes.

He had been unable to get through to them. His attempt to reach Blascon had ended in failure, and none of the other men had responded either. Instead they had reacted to his suggestions with suspicion and almost a touch of anger. What, give up our culture? Become beasts?

Delaunay began to feel that he was on a fool's errand. The Sallat values did not take into accoun the existence of threatening, war

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like, sub-human races. Any deviation from life as usual, any curtailment of custom and ceremony, meant a step backward toward the beast.

The Sallat culture was a unique, wonderful thing. That was why it had attracted him after he had rejected his own. But you have to stop somewhere, for the sake of mere survival. You can't keep playing the guitar and praying for a happy sunset with the Krozni lurking in the woods.

Then he wondered: why keep trying to reach them? *Let* them play their guitars; they'd never understand. *Withdraw, withdraw,* came the familiar voice. *This is not your struggle.*

Angrily he tried to fight the feeling. But the sound of soft strumming and low, rhythmic chanting that came to him through the trees, was interrupted by the sound of gunfire in the distance. Suddenly, wildly, he wanted out.

HE STUMBLED into the little hut the next morning, after a terrifying night filled with the far-off noise of shots and screams, and through it all the persistent grey chanting of the Songs of the Dead. He knew he was somewhere behind Krozni lines, but he didn't care; the hut meant *people,* and he didn't want to be alone any longer.

The interior of the hut was dimly lit. There were two Krozni squatting on the floor at the entrance—stubby, ashen-grey creatures wearing just breechclouts. Delaunay looked at them scornfully, and wondered why such creatures should be able to overthrow so easily an ancient and sophisticated civilization.

"Hello there," said a warm, husky voice from the shadows of the back of the hut. "Good to see a human face again." The voice spoke in Terran.

"Who's there?" Delaunay asked.

"The name is Bronstein," said the voice. "You can come closer, if you like."

Delaunay peered into the shadows and saw a middle-aged Terran, bald, with a pair of old-fashioned spectacles hiding weak-looking, probably watery eyes. He moved closer.

The other muttered a few guttral words to the two Krozni, who clambered to their feet and stumped out. Then he turned to Delaunay.

"You're the Earthman who's been fighting with the Sallat, aren't you? I suppose you're going to hate me, then."

"Hate you? Why? A fellow-Terran held captive on an alien planet? We should be the best of friends," Delaunay said.

"I'm no captive," said Bronstein carefully. "I'm the Krozni general."

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FOR A MOMENT Delaunay did not understand. Then it slowly filtered through to him.

"You're the Krozni general?" he repeated slowly.

"Of course," the other said, smiling. "Without me the Sallat would have mopped these animals up in a week, once they overcame their strange ways of making war. I'm the one who's responsible, all by myself."

"An Earthman deliberately destroying the Sallat?" In a sudden burst of unthinking rage Delaunay reached forward to seize Bronstein, but the other nimbly retreated back into the shadows. They confronted each other across Bronstein's portable desk.

"That's not the way to get even," Bronstein said. "It would take a long time to beat me to death." He pointed to Delaunay's holster. "Why not just shoot me? I'm unarmed."

Delaunay drew his gun and contemplated it for a moment. Then he looked up at Bronstein.

"You're leading the Krozni?" he said again, as if refusing to believe it. *"Why,* for God's sake?"

"Sit down," Bronstein said. "Put that gun away and I'll tell you."

"I'll keep it out."

"Fair enough. But listen to me. I've been sent by Earth to aid the Krozni in their struggle against the Sallat. The men who sent me know exactly what they're doing. And the Sallat have nothing to do with the plan, except that they happen to be in the way. They're elected to be the first victims of the Krozni."

One of the Krozni re-entered the shack, and Bronstein whispered something in his ear. Then he turned back to Delaunay.

"What are you doing here?" he asked conversationally. "Why did you leave Earth?"

"I lost interest in Earth," Delaunay said, mastering his anger. "I'm *seeking* something on this planet. And I was finding it. Until—until you started stirring up the Krozni."

"You lost interest in Earth," said Bronstein. "Exactly. You're well aware that Terra is stagnating from lack of challenge. Terra is almost a sleepwalker's world now, with everyone but a few going through a mindless routine simply because there's nothing better to do. You knew that. What did you try to do about it?"

"Nothing," Delaunay admitted. "I left and came here."

"You left and came here," Bronstein repeated, mimicking Delaunay's inflection. "Very fine. You ran away from Earth because it bored you. But has it occurred to you that there are some people who are coping with Earth's problems in a more constructive fashion?"

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"What does this have to do with the Sallat?" Delaunay demanded.

"Nothing, unfortunately. I greatly regret that the Sallat are mixed up in this. Our only concern is with the Krozni. Earth needs the Krozni. The Krozni represent a potential challenge to Earth—the challenge necessary to stop this slow slide downward. We're in the position of having to create enemies because there are none around."

"You mean you're deliberately helping the Krozni crush the Sallat for the sake of Earth?"

"Forget the Sallat," Bronstein said impatiently. "What we're doing is building up the Krozni. We want to develop them until they're serious challengers to Earth. The raw material's there; they're a battling, aggressive people—the way the Earthmen used to be. With a little guidance, a few well-engineered victories, the proper cultural manipulation, they'll overcome their present primitivism and start looking toward Earth. And then Earth will rise and slap them down. It's a matter of challenge and response. Earth is dying from lack of challenge, so we have to build one out of the most likely material."

Delaunay drew a deep breath. He was astonished by the audacity of the scheme, and even more by Bronstein's coolness. "Without your intervention the Sallat would have put down the Krozni, and Earth wouldn't get its challenger?"

"Probably. They'd have had a hard time of it, because they're so fantastically unwarlike, but eventually I think they'd have beaten the Krozni. When I started working with the Krozni they hardly knew anything about the teamwork necessary for war; it's only been since I've been here that they've become an efficient fighting machine."

"Then I'm going to have to kill you," Delaunay said. He raised the gun.

"Wait!" said Bronstein. The single syllable cut hard into Delaunay. "Before you start blasting, tell me why."

"Because I'm entering into the situation myself—on the side of the Sallat. I happen to think the Sallat are every bit as important as Earth, and that there's just as much reason to save one as the other. I'm not worried about Earth."

Bronstein nodded, staring at Delaunay's gun. "I know. You never were."

"Why should I be? I've withdrawn from Earth. Why not be loyal to the Sallat instead?"

"That's a hard question," Bronstein replied slowly. "But you're overlooking one big factor. Earth's worth saving. *The Sallat aren't.* Despite what you're thinking. The Sallat are through;

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they've had it. They're dead without knowing it. Look at the way they're meeting the challenge of the Krozni right now. Are they adapting to cope with it? No, not at all. Their culture's long past the point of adaptability. Tell me what they're doing?"

"They're singing songs and getting killed like flies," Delaunay said lamely.

"Maybe now you see the picture a little more clearly. There are many superficial similarities between the culture of Terra and that of Sallat," Bronstein said. "They're both bogged down in a morass of traditions and rituals and routines. You probably didn't realize that; the things you loved about Sallat were the very things you despised on Earth, with subtle variations. But there's a real difference.

"The Sallat are an incredibly old people. They have a wonderful culture, but it's fossilized around them. They're in an age-old never-never land of rituals and singing. All very beautiful, and I can appreciate your attachment to it, but it's sterile. The first really serious problem they come up against will finish them. I'm proving that right now."

"But Earth—"

"But Earth isn't that way at all," said Bronstein. "The Terran culture is quite the opposite. It *seems* to be showing cultural tendencies isomorphic to those of Sallat, but the pattern's not the same. Both cultures are in a sort of stasis just now, but for Sallat it's the permanent stasis of senility. Terra is still immature; it's a young culture which has outgrown all its growth stimuli. Terra needs the challenge of the Krozni to dynamite it out of its rut and push it on to its full growth. And the Sallat, who have had their day, now can make themselves useful for the last time as stepping-stones for the Krozni."

Delaunay considered this. He thought of Brascon and his many-stringed guitar, and of the strange harmonies of the Sallat music, and of Tsalto lying dead somewhere on a hill.

"It's a cold-blooded, ghastly thing, and it stinks."

"True," said Bronstein. "But necessary."

NECESSARY? Delaunay looked at Bronstein's placid face. He wondered what the Sallat would say—Marya, for instance.

Suppose Marya were facing Bronstein, and Bronstein told her that her people stood in the way of Earth's progress. Chokingly, he realized what she would say—she, or Demet, or Tsalto, or any of them: "Then we must be destroyed, of course."

He pictured one, then another

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Sallat. And the answer was always the same. The Sallat had nothing greedy about them. They would see the cosmic necessity, and would bow to it.

In any case, he alone couldn't change the picture. He handed his gun over to Bronstein. "You're right," he said softly. It was a bitter-tasting concession. "You win."

Bronstein smiled. "All right, Jack," he called to someone outside the hut. Another Terran entered, tall, bronzed, carrying a powerful Bedrickson blaster.

"You had me covered all the time," Delaunay said ruefully.

"We can't afford to miss any bets," replied Bronstein. "We have to have aces in the hole all the time."

Delaunay looked at the tall man named Jack, and back at Bronstein. Together, these two were methodically destroying a culture which had been building for a thousand thousand years, for the sake of one whose years were still numbered in thousands.

"What should I do now?"

"Nothing," replied Bronstein. "Just go back to Sallat and stay there. Don't tell them anything, and don't try to help them win the war. It'll only make our job harder, and it won't work, as I think you found out. And it *mustn't* work."

"All right," said Delaunay, sourly. "I'll go back and study my music and collect pieces of sculpture and go to dances. And one day you and your Krozni are going to come roaring in and smash the whole thing."

"It's sad, isn't it?" said Bronstein, and Delaunay thought he could detect some genuine sadness on the older man's face. "But Earth is more important."

"Yes," Delaunay found his voice saying. "Earth is more important."

Again the voice within him said, *withdraw, withdraw,* but this time he realized that the voice was speaking just from habit. There was nothing he could do *but* withdraw, and his final withdrawal was, paradoxically, the greatest involvement. By refusing to aid the Sallat he was striking a mighty blow for Earth. The Sallat were doomed, and the Earth these men desired would be triumphantly reborn—someday. First the Krozni would have to grow, and crush dozens of other civilizations throughout the galaxy, before their march would at last shake Terra out of her lethargy.

He turned to go. These men had all the bets covered. There was no point in struggling to save the Sallat, now that he saw the Sallat themselves would not want to be saved if they knew the situation. There was nothing left but withdrawal and waiting, he and Marya and his music—and

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the dream of Earth.

He got up and walked toward the door of the shack. Before he stepped out he turned back and looked at Bronstein, and wondered just what was going through Bronstein's mind.

"There's one bet you haven't covered," Delaunay said, beginning to tremble. "One part of your plan that might go astray."

"What's that?" asked Bronstein.

"Suppose the Krozni become too good a challenge for Earth? Suppose they decide not to be just sparring partners, and they go ahead and march right through Terra the way they're marching through the Sallat? Suppose Terra can't stop them either?"

It seemed to Delaunay that a trace of naked fear showed on Bronstein's pale face for a moment. "That's the wild card in the deck," Bronstein said, as Delaunay started to walk away. "The joker."

Delaunay nodded, and wondered how Bronstein could assume the burden of such a crushing responsibility. Then he turned and started trudging off in the general direction of the Sallat village, to await the onslaught of the Krozni.

∞ ∞ ∞

The Fool

Continued from page 77

because of his last words, forgiving them. Naturally, they fitted Duncan right in; forgiving anybody would be the least likely idea in any Tarchik's mind if he were being speared.

So the Tarchiki think they've made a terrible mistake, and they seem bent on spending the rest of time making up for it. It's the leading religion now, and it's the biggest joke I've ever come across. Poor Duncan, wrongheaded as he was about nearly everything else, had a bit of sense in that department; he never had any religious nonsense in him.

Anyway, it shows you, doesn't it? I've always said you can learn a little from practically anything. You keep Duncan in mind, any time you get to feeling too soft on these natives. He might be a god to these Tarchiki, but I'll tell you the real test of whether a man's got any sense; he's dead I'm alive, and you're alive. That's enough proof for me. ∞

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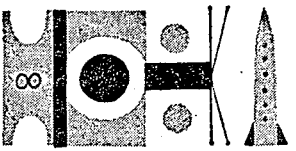
By the editor



DOWN WITH PEOPLE!

WHENEVER I start feeling too friendly towards the rest of the human race, and want a reminder that a lot of its members are slobs I shouldn't take too seriously or lend money to, I visit a planetarium. Invariably, I come away feeling that machines have people beat seven ways from Sunday and twice on weekdays.

The planetarium itself—the projector, not the building—is entirely wonderful. Its awesome intricacy impresses me all over again no matter how often I see it. In addition, I get a purely science-fictional kick from looking at it: it is so reminiscent of a gigantic, multi-eyed, spider-like Martian looming over its hapless prey. . . .

The people one meets on such a visit, though, are something else again. The lecturers are about as inept as they can be at imparting their knowledge of the nature of the universe to an audience. It's sad but true: in many years of planetarium-hopping, I have seen some fine shows, but I have yet to hear an even passable speaker!

On the other hand, most members of the audience seem equally inept at receiving that knowledge. Recently, I heard a speaker explain that the planet Mercury, like Earth's moon, has a period of rotation equal to its period of revolution, so that Mercury's day is equal in length to its year. A bit later, a man behind me was repeating the whole thing to his companion, who was confused.

"It's like this," he said. "You stand at one spot on Mars, and you'll always see the sun directly overhead—it will always be daytime!"

Which may help to explain (I thought with some pain as the artificial stars circled overhead) why science fiction may never be as popular as some forms of literature. If a human being can't understand a simple astronomical fact, he won't understand a story that uses that fact as its take-off point.

The fact that the moon always turns one face towards Earth reminds me of something else, too. Science-fiction writers used to put

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any fantastic thing they wanted to on the unseen side. Now we know that the other hemisphere is pretty much like the one we see—and the writers have lost another of their favorite gimmicks.

Many writers today, though, predict futures in which the unseen is exactly like the seen. They extrapolate one trend, or a few trends, and make the results seem applicable to everyone and everything in the universe. If John Smith, the hero, lives in a transparent bubble floating in the ocean, so does everyone else in the world of that particular story.

The real world, of course, isn't like that: people live in a wild variety of things. And Edward Wellen's story in this issue is interesting because, while he spotlights a particular segment of a future world, the segment clearly isn't the whole of that world. There's a vast, complex background, sketched in lightly so as not to interfere with the on-stage action, but very definitely there.

Specifically, Wellen's future Earth seems to be one in which almost everybody has more leisure time than he knows what to do with. As it may in reality, automation has created a wonderful post-work world. And instead of the boon we used to imagine such a development as being, the result is pretty horrible to contemplate.

There's room for a lot more stories on that general theme. What will people *do,* when machines have taken over all the hard labor? It's a good question. . . .

The machines themselves probably won't revolt, as they have so often in science fiction. They won't have to! The personal devil within every human being may find some perverted work for him to do, which will be an equally revolting development.

Which seems to bring us, by a rather devious route, back to the question of machines vs. people. Want to choose up sides?

THE NEW type-face used in this issue, incidentally, has allowed us to add several thousand more words of text without reducing the readability of the magazine. We're proud of it, but it is only one of many improvements we have planned for future issues. These will be announced as soon as possible. Meanwhile, we still want your opinion on what improvements we should make. All suggestions will be considered.

We're quite sure, by the way, that you'd like us to switch to a monthly publishing schedule and start running serials. We have no definite plans to do so yet, but we sincerely want to, and will as soon as we can.

—LTS

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Feedback

THIS DEPARTMENT is strictly for the readers. Ideas about science fiction in general are as welcome as discussions of INFINITY itself. Keep the letters coming to the Editor, c/o Royal Publications, 47 E. 44th St., New York, N. Y.

∞

The second INFINITY—a good deal better than the first, on the whole. Things seemed more consistent, and the choices more professional. Your cover was a lot better as an illustration, and interiors were certainly no worse than Astounding's, though the reproduction was considerably poorer.

Specifically, your best stories were the two long ones, "Quarry" and "Best of Fences." Of the shorts, the three best were Wilson's extra-short, "Course of Empire," "The Engineer," and much as I hate to say it, Ellison's "Glow Worm." Harlan seems to be growing up, and I hope the level of his writing takes off from here.

By far the worst thing in the issue was the Knight filler item. You really must have been stuck for space—or rather for something to fill space. Please . . . no more.

This Kenneth Bulmer—is he H. K. Bulmer of British space opera? (*Yes—Ed.*) I must say he is good. I was surprised to find myself so engrossed in a tale whose story line is extremely well-used. Someone who can do that to an old theme certainly deserves wider and more frequent appearance. More.

As for the rest, well . . . Sometimes DeCamp gets too, too hilarious. The result is another bit of hack-work. I have a great fondness for LSDeC at his best, but when he hacks, he Hacks. And this Halibut thing was a fish.

My overall impression of INF, based on two issues—a pleasant magazine, not too heavy, well-balanced between serious, all-out adventure, light-veined stuff, and maybe a mood piece or two. A magazine which, to enjoy it, I don't have to do some intensive, 24-hour contemplation. If this goes on, I say Welcome to the field.—J. Martin Graetz, Box 374, 3 Ames St., Cambridge 42, Mass.

∞

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ODE TO ???

There are those who like to know that they are being watched for they are vain and egocentric "but" what they can not figure out is who is watching them because there is no body around not that is that can be seen!!

If this is worth anything I would like to realize a little profit from the piece above. If not I would still like to see it in print.—Wm. M. Partridge.

(*We* knew *we hadn't seen the last of Big Brother!—Ed.*)

∞

All right, so I waited till the second issue to write a fan letter. Anyway, I write to praise Damon Knight's "A Likely Story." I am ready to praise practically anything Damon does because he is my second favorite s-f writer. (Any reader who cares to write me his guess who is my first favorite may do so. The first one to give me the correct answer gets an authentic Asimov autograph. Don't crowd now, fellows.)

I keep thinking about this "sense of wonder" people keep talking about, and I'm more or less broken hearted that I can't think up anything intelligent to add to the discussion. It's always been my private opinion that the "sense of wonder" fades as we grow older despite anything we can do, unless one has the good fortune to be a perennial silly adolescent like myself. I don't know that this is always "good fortune" but it does allow me to enjoy Conventions and slobber gleefully over my typewriter as I write. Makes the writing quite painless, you know, for which I thank God.

Of course, I write "heavily thoughtful fiction" but that's just to fool fans who meet me for the first time and say, bug-eyed, "But I thought you had a long white beard!"

Well, keep INFINITY coming—at least until I grow that long, white beard.—Isaac Asimov.

∞

In regard to the second issue of INFINITY I have this to say. I was let down.

The front cover advertised a "Dazzling Space Novelet by Randall D. Garrett". In my opinion there was nothing dazzling about that one. Just plain stupidness. That no one in four centuries of space travel would have investigated Jupiter type planets seems incredible.

"Quarry" by Kenneth Bulmer rates my highest praise and its inclusion benefitted the issue a great deal.

"Glow Worm" by Ellison was a good piece of writing but the ending puzzled me. The qualities Seligman possessed seemed to me in all ways superior to those of mankind. Why did he feel that humans must not have his qualities?

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"A Likely Story" by Damon Knight was excellent.

Finally, "Fanfare" was even more enjoyable than last issue's pinnacle of success.

All in all I guess I wasn't too badly disappointed.—Tom Driscoll, 3247 Donnybrook Lane, Cincinnati 31, Ohio.

∞

Your editorial is like a bottle of Air-Wick in a sewer. With everyone and his brother shrieking for a return to the good old days of science fiction and the return of a "sense of wonder", it's quite nice to see that someone has done some serious thinking on the subject. I find my views in general accordance with those that you express; thirty years ago everything in science fiction was wonderful and awe-inspiring. A trip to the moon brought gasps from the startled reader, time travel was fresh and new, and stf was really hot stuff. But times have changed, as everyone knows, and the things that made a reader catch his breath in 1926 will often make him catch his stomach in 1956. A great deal of modern science fiction, chock full of psi and esp, is for the interstellar birds, and I will be the first to admit it. But by the same token, the stuff that some of our leading editors are trying to bring back would be better off to remain buried. Everyone seems bent on going to extremes, but why can't a compromise be reached? Modern ideas, coupled with the better writing that earlier years brought forth, would be my idea of tops.

INFINITY is still fun to read, and I don't expect any change in the pattern. Go monthly and begin running some serials and you'll wind up on top of the heap for sure. Fact is, just maintain the quality that you've shown in the first two issues, and you'll be giving everyone a rough time . . . except your readers!—Kenn Curtis, 4722 Peabody Ave., Cincinnati 27, Ohio.

∞

There's just one little point I'd like to question in your Editor's Page. You say: "But the characters in the story should be able to understand and manipulate the gadgets. Otherwise who wants to read about them?"

Oh, come now; what about those stories about people who *don't* understand gadgets, or know how to manipulate them—or the sub-variant of knowing *merely* how to manipulate them? "The Machine Stops," by Forster, "The Machine," by Don John W. Campbell Stuart, and the whole spectrum of Utopia goes sour plots? Sure, the theme *is* a bit overdone, or has been, but the good stuff in it had gusto, wonder, oomph, or what-have-you. (*My point exactly—Ed.*)—Carlyle N. Taylor, 675 N. Kenmore Ave., Los Angeles 29, Cal.

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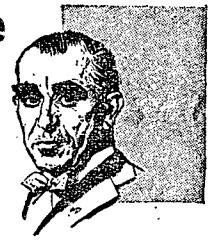
We're Looking For People Who Like To Draw!



by Albert Dorne

FAMOUS MAGAZINE ILLUSTRATOR

DO YOU LIKE TO DRAW? If you do —America's 12 Most Famous Artists are looking for you. We want you to test your art talent!

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Don Smith lives in New Orleans. Three years ago Don knew nothing about art—even doubted he had talent. Today, he is an illustrator with a leading advertising agency in the South—and has a future as big as he wants to make it.

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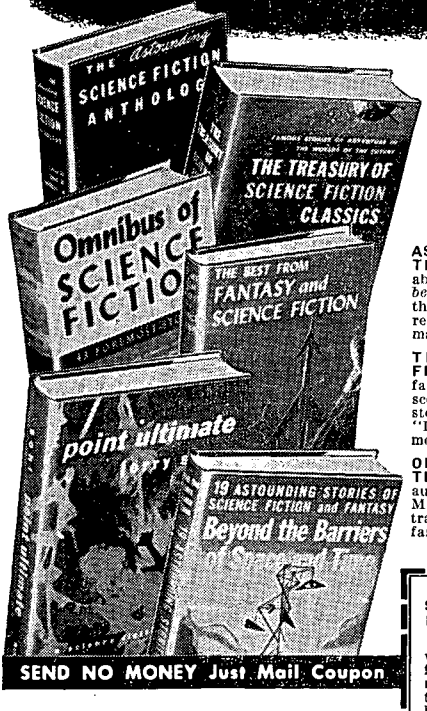
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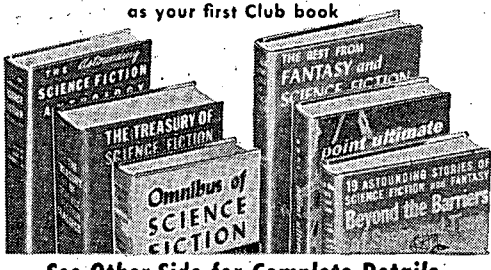
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